When Your Mind Is Clear, the Sun Shines All the Time

A Guidebook for Overcoming Depression

JILL MASCHIO

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my wonderful
husband for sharing with me the meaning
of love. You have always believed in me and
in all my undertakings, especially this book.
You were the rock that stabilized our marriage
when I was going through depression;
you have always been by my side.

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Introduction

It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.
URSULA K. LE GUIN

I used education to overcome depression. The knowledge I gained through education became useful when I applied specific topics and concepts to my life. Then I devised a method, using what I learned in school and the discipline of applying it, to help, inform, and educate others so that they could help themselves. Even though I was depressed, I never used the word *depressed,* because depression is classified as a mental illness. I discovered that my condition was caused by a lack of some basic thinking skills. Because I lacked these skills, I could not think outside my own mental box. My narrow thinking affected both my emotions and my behavior.

If I had not pursued an education, I would not have learned the skills that helped me overcome depression. I needed to learn critical thinking and decision-making skills to challenge the way I perceived my problems and my world, including myself. Conventional wisdom in the field of mental health calls depression an illness, a mental disorder; however, there is much controversy over this. The word *disorder* means a person's thinking, feeling, moods, and ability to relate to others have been disrupted. Depression has also been tagged an abnormality that affects the mind, as well as a failure of internal mechanisms that maintain psychological adjustments. Although there are disagreements about exactly what depression is, most of us agree that depression manifests through various symptoms including feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts.

People experience different levels of depression. Some experience depression and are not aware of it; some experience symptoms and try to control them. Although some people experience severe and abnormal levels of depression that involve chemical imbalances, my depression was not of that type. I believe that anyone with any type of depression can benefit from the information in this book, which can serve as a support alongside psychotherapy and drug therapy. This book may also be helpful

for loved ones who want to gain a greater understanding of the problem. In my opinion, many people feel depressed for the same reasons that I did. In general, we have not learned thinking skills that enable us to make sound decisions; thus, our decisions and thinking lead us astray. As a result, our lives don't work and we suffer. It is my hope that health professionals will look for other causes before making a diagnosis of mental illness in anyone who has symptoms of depression. I believe that many people can overcome depression through acquiring critical thinking skills, as I did.

This book contains the basic skills and the ten steps that I discovered as I overcame depression. This is a workbook, which means that you will have to do some work to get the most out of it. I suggest that you take your time as you read it, chapter by chapter, and that you do all the exercises. As you move through the book, the power of your work will build and at some point you will find yourself feeling, perhaps for the first time in a long time, really good about yourself and your life. I encourage you to read and use the resources listed at the end of the chapters to deepen your understanding of this material and of yourself. Because education and the knowledge from books saved me, I am a proponent of reading as therapy. The term for this is *bibliotherapy*. Several studies have shown that bibliotherapy elicits results comparable to drug therapy or psychotherapy, including one in which people who used bibliotherapy recovered from depression faster than did those on conventional therapies. Additionally, they tended to improve with time, as opposed to the remission often observed in those on conventional therapy. Bibliotherapy also works in conjunction with other therapies. But no matter how long you have been depressed, no matter what methods you have used or not used to help yourself in the past or what you are doing now, I invite you to begin this journey. As you read and work, remember: you are not alone, and no matter how dark the future seems, a bright new day is on the way.

Part 1

1

Depression: What Is Going On With My Life?

For this relief much thanks; tis bitter cold,
and I am sick at heart.
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

I clearly remember the period in my life when it seemed as though I was going nowhere. I sensed that my life was not heading down the right road; I just seemed to be existing and felt no hope of finding meaning and purpose, no hope of finding a solution. I cried frequently, but generally didn't know why. Then, to top it off, I couldn't shake the horrible feelings I had about myself. I felt that something was wrong with me, constantly criticized myself, and remember often thinking thoughts like, I'm not good enough; People don't like me; Nobody will love me for who I am. These thoughts and feelings seemed to linger around me like a dark cloud that followed me everywhere, yet I didn't want anybody telling me that something was wrong with me. For me, the thought of taking antidepressants meant that I would have to surrender any control I had left over my life to something or someone, which was not an option I could consider. Furthermore, I refused to believe that I was depressed—all I wanted was for my life to change. I wanted to find meaning and purpose; I wanted to be happy and feel excitement about life; I wanted some answers. How could *wanting* those things in my life signify depression? And why did finding some simple answers seem impossible?

In my whole life, I have seen two different counselors a total of three times. The second counselor was about forty minutes away from where we lived, and I had to drive across town to get there. When I arrived, I checked in with the receptionist, who asked me to sit in the waiting area. Walking away from her, I took a quick look around.

To my left, I noticed a quiet hallway with offices, their doors closed and without any signs on them. I headed over to the waiting area and sat on the couch. Although I waited only a few minutes, it seemed much longer than that.

Sitting on the couch, all I could see was the reception area and the front door. The wall behind the receptionist's desk was glass, and I could see the parking lot and people walking by. While I waited, I looked at everyone who walked by or sat in the waiting area, trying to judge whether they looked like a normal person or something out of a novel. To my surprise, everyone around me looked normal, which comforted me — I really didn't want to feel I was the only abnormal one in a group of normal people.

Then a woman appeared from around the corner and called my name. My first thought was that she'd be nice, judging from her appearance. She was of medium height with short brown hair, wearing a pair of blue slacks with a matching dress shirt. I walked over to her, we shook hands and began our walk down that quiet hallway.

She started a casual conversation. "Hi. How are you today?" I replied that I was fine, and I looked at each door during the walk down the hall. As we approached the counselor's office, a rush of feelings came over me. I thought, if I walk through the doorway now, there's no turning around until the session is over, and I don't know if I'll like how things go. What if she tells me something bad? What if she asks me personal questions? Nevertheless, I entered the room.

The counselor welcomed me into her cozy office and told me to have a seat on her multicolored, pinstriped couch. She asked me a few general questions about where I lived, for how long, and if I was married or had ever been divorced. Curious, I gazed around her office while she talked. She sat about three feet from me at a small wooden desk with her chair directly across from me so that we were facing each other. A lamp gave a warm, welcoming feeling to the room. Beside the lamp, within arm's reach, was a box of facial tissue. The walls were decorated with diplomas, not pictures.

The counselor began asking me deeper questions, and during the third question I started to cry. I was feeling extremely vulnerable. Part of me wanted to leave, but part of me wondered if she could give me some advice that would change how I was feeling. She had a genuine look of concern on her face, and when she talked to me, she would lean in toward me and speak with a soft tone of voice. Her eyes were constantly on me, but I avoided making much eye contact. The more eye contact I made the more vulnerable I felt, so I was either wiping tears from my eyes or staring at the blank, white wall. I thought she'd stop asking me questions since I kept crying harder the longer the session continued, but the questions kept coming and I kept crying harder. Finally the session ended and she gave her verdict: I had some things to overcome. I

was already aware of that, but now I felt even worse than before, hearing it come from someone else.

As I left the office, I tried to cover up the tears so nobody would notice. I got into my car and rushed out of the parking lot, weeping all the way home. When I got home I went straight to the living room and started listening to music on the radio. I ended up on the living room floor in a fetal position, where I spent an hour or more weeping. I felt comforted by the floor; I wanted to stay there forever — or at least until my depression was over.

The week between the first and second counseling sessions was even harder. The most difficult was during the day, when it felt as though there was a glaze over my existence. Where ever I looked, the glaze was there. I tried to shake it off, but it was there even in my thoughts. I felt a constant anxiety, my chest felt tight, and sometimes I had trouble breathing. I didn't want to be left alone, because then things were even worse. Sometimes I'd go for a drive or to the grocery store, hoping that would remove the glaze; at times it helped, other times it didn't.

When I returned for the second counseling session, the same thing happened; she would ask questions and I would cry. The most devastating part came at the end of this session. With her concerned look, the counselor leaned in toward me and asked, "Do you mind if I talk your situation over with the board members here?"

I told her I didn't mind, but actually I was scared and confused as to why she would want to do that. I immediately thought, I must be really bad off if she has to take my case to the board members. Then she said softly, "I think we should get you on some antidepressants." The session ended on that note.

During the next week, while trying to hold myself together, I decided I wasn't going back to the counselor that I wasn't going to any counselor. I only felt worse, and after two sessions she hadn't told me anything that could help me. Well, she did teach me a relaxation exercise, specifically, to sit in a chair and relax each part of the body, one at a time, but I couldn't do that in the state I was in then. The exercise actually made the symptoms worse, since when I sat still, the thoughts in my mind would race even faster and I couldn't stop them. It would have been better for me to get my mind involved in some activity, even something as simple as cleaning the house.

In the weeks to come, I began feeling a little better and started attending an online university class on Critical Thinking. At first I didn't understand what it was about, but I was taking it because it was required for my Bachelor's degree. Little did I know that this class would benefit me the most and create profound changes in my life. As I took the course, the glazed feeling started to lift, but I still felt the dark cloud over me.

I continued my education online when, later that year, we moved out of state.

After moving out of that town, I realized I needed to dig deep and find some answers as to why I felt the way I did. Though I couldn't find the kind of help I thought needed to overcome depression, I became determined to work through it on my own. As a result, the answers I found through education turned my life completely around.

My quest for an education began in my early 20s, three years after I dropped out of high school. I started by taking a couple of courses, but I had to quit when we couldn't afford it any longer. Learning was not easy. I particularly struggled with math; although I had to take pre-Algebra twice, I still failed. I could never seem to understand the whole math concept. English was a struggle for me to learn, also. I was amazed when I received an A in English, in spite of failing the final exam. No matter what, I never gave up on my dream.

Then in my mid-20s, I got another chance to pursue my education. A course in communications was a big help to me, as it introduced me to the skill of identifying my feelings, something I had never done before. Later on, three required courses had a profound influence. The Critical Thinking course that I mentioned earlier concerned the basics of how the human mind thinks. The skills I gained from that course enabled me to discover how I had been forming faulty conclusions about past experiences. Later I realized that forming faulty conclusions and believing them to be true was instrumental in my depression.

The second important course was Managerial Decision-Making. Critical thinking skills correlate with making decisions, so the two courses went hand-in-hand. The third course, Leadership in Management, opened my eyes to who I really am: my values, my beliefs, and my personality traits.

Then one morning, as I was doing the regular workout routine I had been doing for ten years, I suddenly realized how to use my skills and knowledge. Every morning I'd wake up, drink a cup of coffee, put on some comfortable, baggy workout clothes, pull my hair into a pony tail, and head into my workout room. I like to mix up my exercise routines, so one day I may walk and the next day ride a bike or do aerobics.

This particular day I decided to do aerobics. The room was fairly big and the workout equipment took up a lot of the space. I had a little radio on a stand near the television. I usually listened to the radio or watched television while working out, and on this day, I was listening to the radio. As I started pacing the length of the room to accelerate my heartbeat and warm up my legs, I sensed the dark cloud above me—the usual sad, depressed feeling—but this time I started to ask myself questions.

What Am I Feeling?

All I could determine was that I was feeling both sadness and anger, but I remembered learning in the Critical Thinking course that our beliefs and desires are often hidden. I figured my problem must be hidden, perhaps under my feelings. I continued pondering the same question and started to listen to myself.

As I searched for an answer to the question—What am I feeling?— I was shocked to find myself beginning to pinpoint the feelings to one particular event and loss in my life. Aha! Now I had the first insight into one possible cause for my depression.

This was the start of my journey, when I first began to use what I had learned from those three courses to discover not only the root cause of my depression, but also how my mind operated to keep me from overcoming it. From this point on, I felt everything was going to be all right with my life.

Discovering answers on my own was greatly satisfying and rewarding. One reward was how the answers became real to me. I kept gaining more insight into my problems, which eventually led to personal growth. I could see myself starting to become the person I had always imagined myself to be. As I gradually overcame my depression, I also noticed how much easier it was to learn; depression had been limiting my ability to learn. Once I started to overcome depression, I could think more clearly. In fact, I graduated from the Master's program with straight As and was on the Chancellor's list in the Doctoral program.

I refused to take antidepressants and attend counseling sessions; instead, I discovered another way that worked well for me. I have to credit overcoming my depression to my education, which provided me with the knowledge and the wisdom to overcome those feelings. Education enabled me to become an independent thinker and to gain resources to apply to my problems. I needed both the skills and the knowledge for success.

Although I didn't want to take antidepressants, that doesn't mean mine is the road everyone should take. I'm not a doctor and don't claim to be one, nor do I know everything about depression. All I know is what worked for me, and that the tools and knowledge I gained have allowed my life to keep getting better. But I would never recommend that someone else refuse antidepressants, since medication may help.

I do believe, however, that many people are being prescribed antidepressants instead of being given good, solid information that could be just as effective, and possibly as empowering as drugs, if not more so. As I mentioned before, there are known benefits to bibliotherapy (reading self-help books). Recent studies show that this method can be as useful as cognitive therapy and general counseling. Without

reading and learning, I would not be where I am today; the skills and knowledge I learned are providing me with long-term benefits.

Now that I have overcome major battles, I want to help others avoid suffering as I did. You can acquire the same skills, knowledge, and wisdom that I did. I hope that when you understand what I learned, you will have similar results that will increase the possibility of you having a happy, fulfilling life.

This book relates the information and skills I learned, along with the tools I used to overcome my depression. I will walk you through the steps that I took. The book has three parts. Part One contains introductory material that will help you get the most out of the book. Part Two explains the topic of depression and the skills I learned. Part Three teaches you how to connect with your emotional state to better understand your feelings and thoughts, and then how to identify the underlying needs expressed by your feelings and thoughts. Once you identify these needs and the reasons behind your negative thinking, you will learn how to apply critical thinking to help overcome your depression. The book is designed to be a workbook you can use to work through your problems.

It took time for me to learn these skills and how to apply them. I don't recommend reading this book in one evening; in fact, it may take you a week, two weeks, or even longer just to digest one chapter. My advice is to take it slow and understand the material thoroughly so you can apply it. I had to think hard and face many painful experiences from the past. This was difficult and took some time. If you do as I did, using the skills I teach, you'll discover how to step outside your situation and analyze it, instead of simply reliving it.

We all have feelings. To deny our feelings is to deny our very existence. Imagine a life without feeling happiness or falling in love, without feeling passion for things like sports or working out or music. Imagine how great it feels to be outside on a sunny morning and to feel a light, cool breeze upon your face. It is exciting to be able to complete new tasks or challenges in life, such as running a marathon, being on a winning basketball team or learning to drive. We cherish the moments of holding the hand of someone we love or seeing a smile upon the face of a child.

Our feelings allow us to experience these situations. We feel happy or sad, angry, afraid, or frustrated. Yet, when we don't fully understand the reasons behind our feelings, we can't know their root causes. For feelings related to depression, we can only understand how an experience or event affects us if we recognize how we feel about it. Many of us don't understand what we feel, or why. If we don't understand our own feelings, how can we begin to understand the feelings of others around us, such as our children and spouse?

Positive Feelings

Feeling happy is positive. People generally strive to have more positive experiences in order to feel good or happy. When we feel good, we act happy and our behavior reflects that feeling. Others around us feel it, too, and are influenced by our behavior, as we are by theirs. I have a friend who is always upbeat about life. I enjoy being with her because I have fun and feel happier in her presence; her positive attitude rubs off on me. I also love to watch funny movies that make me feel good about life. When I laugh during a good comedy, I feel excited about life.

Negative Feelings

Negative feelings such as frustration, fear, anger, anxiety, and depression stimulate the release of chemicals that, over the long term, can damage the immune system, the endocrine system, and other systems in the body. Negative feelings make us feel down and frustrated.

The Power of the Mind

Our minds can remember our feelings. We remember much of our past experiences by reliving them; we have all remembered how we felt at that particular time while reflecting on a vivid experience. When an experience is positive, you remember positive images and feelings. You remember a loved one by reflecting on your love for that person. You may remember your favorite birthday because you felt happy. Perhaps you finally received the gift you had been wanting and jumped with excitement upon opening the gift, or perhaps your best friend was there.

Our minds can also remember the bad experiences. When previous experiences evoke feelings of sadness, the memories are painful to relive. We may try to bury them, but by suppressing them, we only become troubled by them later. Those feelings become as much a part of our lives as our positive memories, and they persist no matter how much we try to push them down in hopes of forgetting them and erasing them from memory. Instead, the mind continues to reference them because burying them does not provide any type of release, and the negative feelings continue to build up.

Because feelings can exist on a subconscious level, we may not be fully aware of how they affect our thinking and behavior. Without knowing it, we make daily decisions that stem from our feelings and from the subconscious conclusions we have formed about them. The longer our feelings remain hidden and buried, the longer our thoughts and behaviors are unknowingly and continually influenced by them.

Modern society influences people to live a fast-paced lifestyle. Living in this headlong rush, people are always in a hurry to be somewhere or get a task done.

We have multiple, often conflicting, responsibilities. All of these prevent us from slowing down long enough to listen to what our feelings are telling us.

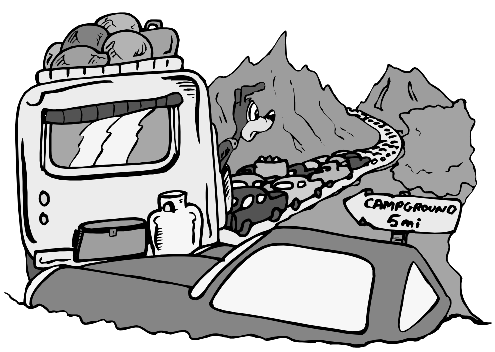
Most of us aspire to achieve our fullest potential and to attain internal self-fulfillment. We want to wake up each morning happy to start the day. We have an inner drive to find this fulfillment, and when we veer off course, our minds know it on some level, even if we are not consciously aware of it. The human body tells us when our stomach is hungry, when rest is needed, or when we have overexerted the body. In the same way, something in us lets us know when we are off course: we become discontented, we feel not quite right and out of sorts.

Our feelings can serve us like a traffic light. When the light is green, we feel happy; when it's yellow, we sense feelings of caution to warn us, and may feel confusion, sadness, or disappointment. By heeding these inner warnings, we can slow down and take care of the situation that is causing them. When the light is red, we definitely know that something is wrong and feel we're steering off into the ditch. We may feel depressed, anxious, or hopelessness. Yet we can still slow down, listen, and learn some tools that will empower us to change the situation. We can begin the process of overturning depression by learning to listen to our feelings.

Here is what some actual people say about how depression feels to them.

Leonard: *Depression is a feeling that I just want to go away, but I don't know how, and it won't even when I do try. It's like a rainy day that never quits. I feel like I'm trying to get somewhere but I'm immobile and can't get there. Some days it feels like a hurricane is approaching and I can't run from it.*

Melinda: *Depression feels like everything in the world is heading one direction and I'm heading another, and I can't turn around. There is a constant feeling of hopelessness and there's no way out. The following picture illustrates how I feel.*



Steven: *I feel like I'm standing on a street corner and everything is passing me by in fast motion and my thoughts are racing in my mind like a steam train. I want the racing thoughts and motion to stop, but it won't and I can't escape from it.*

Why Me: *Why do I have to feel complete darkness inside? Why do I have to feel that I'm in the world by myself and no one else can see, hear, or understand me? My movements seem to get me nowhere. Why won't the negative thinking and emotions leave? Why can't I feel normal or that anyone can save me from the hole of despair? I want someone to love and understand me, and not judge me or see me as weak and helpless, or expect me to simply snap out of it or rise above it. The following picture illustrates how I feel: nobody is speaking my language.*



Cari: *Depression feels like I am numb, except for feeling sad and lonely. I feel like I am trapped in a dark room with no doorway. Depression has been a part of my existence for 17 years. I have come to the belief that it will always be in my life. Some days it overwhelms me and I can't overcome it. Other days I do okay. Sometimes it feels like a dark cloud over me that I can't outrun. It affects every part of my life, my thoughts especially . . . my confidence, relationships, goals, hopes, etc.*

You Are Not Alone

Because I felt so isolated in my situation, I was almost sure nobody could understand what I was going through. The only comfort I had during that time was my husband. He is also my best friend, and he listened to me, showing compassion and interest in helping me solve my depression. I didn't realize that there were other people who felt the same emotions as I did. Be assured, if you have any of these same thoughts and feelings, you're not alone.

Depression affects millions of people in the United States each year; people of every age, race, economic status, and cultural background get depressed. Depression is so widespread and serious that it is now the leading cause of all disability in the United States and worldwide. It is more prevalent than the diseases caused by all cancers, ischemic heart disease, cardiovascular disease, alcohol use, road traffic accidents, diabetes, and other illnesses.

The number of people with depression keeps growing, and other countries besides the United States are looking for solutions. Canada realizes the vast problem of depression among Canadian girls. Canadian studies suggest that one in four girls will experience major depression. The United Kingdom is highly concerned about the effects of poor self-esteem in the workplace and is currently seeking solutions. However, the United States, the most powerful country in the world, reports a higher rate of depression than almost any other country.

Depression Does Not Feel Like a Medical Term

Depression isn't picky about who it chooses; it afflicts people in every walk of life. Because "depression" is a medical term, it is classified as a mental disorder and illness. Scientists have been trying to prove different theories about how it originates and operates, but haven't yet found a definitive cause. To the individual who suffers from it, however, depression is not medical; it is simply a feeling of inescapable hopelessness. There is no relief from its revved-up emotions and racing thoughts. To people who live with it, depression is a struggle just to make it through the day. It seems impossible to shake off and hovers like a low, dark cloud.

In my own life, I often wished I could just wake up one morning and it would all be gone, but that didn't happen. I know that at times my husband also wished that I would just stop, forget about it, and move on with my life. The effects of feeling depressed were devastating for me. My quality of life changed: my relationships changed, and I began to be less able to function. I found it hard to hold a job, have any goals, initiate new friendships, or relate to coworkers or even family and friends. At times, I found myself wanting only to lie around the house. I would mope for days, feeling there was no hope for me.

Benefits of Overcoming Depression

Although the benefits of overcoming depression may seem obvious, it is hard to imagine ever feeling joy, happiness, and inner peace when you are experiencing it. You become so consumed with wanting the problem to go away that you can't imagine what happiness would feel like. Overcoming depression is a life-changing experience that affects you both physically and mentally. As depression diminishes, health

problems may also diminish as the body's stress levels decrease. For myself, I noticed less anxiety and irritability, and a more stable mood.

After overcoming depression, you can experience general happiness and have a more positive perspective on life. You *can* feel in control of your life and begin to move forward toward your goals. One of the greatest benefits of overcoming depression is that you *can* develop a healthy relationship with yourself, have an exciting outlook on life, and find contentment.

Why Depression Can Go Unrecognized

Although depression affects millions of people, it is often difficult to identify. All too often, people with depression do not even realize that is what they are experiencing; they may not be aware that their constant sadness and self-criticism are due to depression.

Approximately 60 percent of people who experience depression do not get proper help. There are a number of reasons for this problem:

- The symptoms go unrecognized.
- Some people are afraid of being labeled a "depressed person."
- The emotional trauma from depression weighs so heavily on a person's mind that this individual believes there is not proper help available.
- As a result of the emotional and physical symptoms, many cases are misdiagnosed as physical problems, and the depression remains undetected.
- The physical symptoms are treated as the problem rather than the underlying cause.

This happened to me.

It would be great if there were a simple quick fix that would make it all better, but we want real solutions to our problems; we want to feel good about ourselves. Society offers many short-term solutions that may provide temporary relief, but we want to know that there is hope and a long-term solution; we want answers that will last a lifetime.

All of us are in the same boat. We are all trying to make it. Some people seem to make it better than others, but all of us are seeking to find the answers to life's questions: What will make me happy? How can I be successful? How can I find meaning that will provide long-lasting peace and satisfaction in my life?

In our search for answers, when problems and life get complicated, we hope to magically find a manual that contains the answers we seek. We search for this manual, but we don't find it. Our need for answers is so compelling that we begin to design this manual in our minds. What is the first thing we do to design such a manual? We start

by looking around us at our society and culture. We notice that our neighbor drives a Lexus, so we determine that this must be success. We see people in high-level professions, doing important jobs and making good money, so we think they are successful and admire them. We see a very attractive, well-built person and put her up on a pedestal, so we decide looking like her will bring us happiness. We conclude that if we have these material possessions, we also will have happiness, peace, admiration, love, and complete satisfaction.

Surprisingly enough, however, once people acquire these possessions, they can still feel empty inside. As a matter of fact, they may feel even more miserable and frustrated, because in addition to their original problems, they then have more responsibilities, such as a big mortgage payment, a car payment, or more troubles of another kind.

People who think that the constant pursuit of material possessions will satisfy them are only denying their real needs. If we don't discover our deeper needs, we won't find complete satisfaction. The longer we deny our real needs, the more certain it is that depression will creep into our lives.

Why Me?

It has been said that depression is caused by heredity, stemming from biochemical and psychological factors. Illnesses such as stroke, heart attack, cancer, and Parkinson's disease have been cited as possible causes. Hormonal changes such as those occurring at puberty, during pregnancy, and at male and female menopause are also believed to play a role in depression.

People experience depression differently according to their gender and age. For instance, twice as many women than men are affected by depression. Between 10 and 25 percent of all women experience depression, while only 5 to 12 percent of men experience it. Hormonal fluctuations during pregnancy, menstrual cycles, and menopause may contribute to elevated depression levels in women.

Women are faced with many stressors and responsibilities associated with work and family. Women with careers are often also responsible for the majority of household duties, such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning.

While men may be less likely to become depressed than women, a high number of men are reported to suffer from it. It is estimated that between three and four million men in the United States are affected by depression. It may be that fewer men are reported with depression simply because they are undiagnosed. Those men who experience depression are less likely than women to seek help; they may be more reluctant to admit to depression and doctors may be less likely to suspect it in them.

However, men are more likely than women to commit suicide. Instead of talking about their feelings, men often mask them with alcohol or drugs, or by the socially-acceptable habit of working excessively long hours. Depression typically shows up in men as irritability, anger, and discouragement rather than sadness and anxiety.

Depression in elderly people, if undiagnosed and untreated, causes suffering for both the family and the individual. Their symptoms are often described as physical rather than emotional. But people born before the 1940s are reluctant to discuss feelings associated with depression because their generation was raised not to complain or to disclose personal information, so they may not be aware that their symptoms are those of depression.

Depression in children has been taken seriously only in the past two decades. A depressed child may act out his or her emotions in various ways. The depressed child may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that a parent may die, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Older children may sulk, get into trouble at school, be negative or grouchy, and feel misunderstood. Because normal behaviors vary from one childhood stage to another, it can be difficult to tell whether a child is just going through a temporary phase or is suffering from depression.

Causes of Depression

One view, according to David Joffe, is: "It used to be more commonly believed that depression was caused by psychological reactions to a person's environment. Research today is generating more and more evidence that physiological factors are strongly involved, although opinions today are still widely divided within the field as to how much of depression is psychological and how much is physiological. It seems, however, that it is a combination of both; what makes this tricky is that almost every case seems to be unique. What is known is that one major cause of depression is an imbalance in certain chemicals in the brain cells (neurons) called neurotransmitters, which carry signals between brain cells. The particular neurotransmitter that depressives do not have enough of is serotonin, although another, norepinephrine, is also known to play a part."

While studying brain chemistry, however, environment should not be ignored as a factor that can trigger depression. Just as our experiences influence our body's neurochemistry, our environment also influences who we are, who we become, and how we see our world.

Do I Have to Admit the Illness?

In my case, I found it wasn't helpful for me to admit I was depressed because, for

me, admitting it meant I was defeated—and I couldn't allow myself to go there. I found that admitting depression was depressing in itself; it felt like surrendering to hopelessness. It would have meant that my life was over, that there was no hope. When the counselor told me that I should consider taking antidepressants, I felt that if that was the only remedy available, then no one could help me.

It may be helpful for you to begin simply by recognizing that you may have some symptoms of depression, which can signal that something is going on. Keep in mind that recognizing symptoms does not necessitate admitting you are defeated by life. On the contrary, you are acknowledging that you want or need a change, that there is hope, and that the information available to you in this book can help you discover the causes of your symptoms and overcome them.

Recognizable Symptoms

Eating Patterns or Diet

- Eat More
- Eat Less
- More fast foods
- Increase in sugar or too much caffeine
- Consuming unhealthy foods

Sleeping Patterns

- Sleeping late
- Sleep deprivation
- Insomnia or early morning awakening

Physical Body

- Increase in headaches
- Frequent stomachaches
- Chronic or increased aches and pains in the body
- Illness or disease
- Digestive problems
- Restlessness
- More fatigued

Interests

- Diminished interest in previous hobbies and activities
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of interest in being around other people

Feelings and Thoughts

- Anger
- Enclosure (no way out)
- Exclusion
- Frustration
- Negativity
- Overwhelmed
- Persistent worrying
- Pessimism

- Guilt
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Lack of control over life
- Lack of inner peace
- Loss of capacity to make decisions
- Negative, racing thoughts
- Rejection
- Sadness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Unhappiness
- Victimization
- Worthlessness

Possible Stress-Related Causes of Depression

Stress can stem from a number of sources: Unresolved problems in relationships. Money problems. Lack of purpose. Problems that seem insolvable. Illness and disease. Unmet needs for love. Unmet physical needs, such as food, water, or good health. Need for safety. The loss of something or somebody significant. A traumatic event. Low self-esteem. And stress can arise from any of the thoughts and feelings listed in the section above.

Possible Results of Depression

- Loss of job
- Divorce
- Relationship problems
- Unresolved anger
- Pressure at work and home
- Deteriorated living conditions
- Bad decisions
- Inaccurate beliefs
- Anxiety attacks

A Different View: Depression Is Related to Thoughts

Now let's consider a different view. Kathleen Fedeouloff's position is that the way the mind thinks is a main factor in depression. This view suggests that depression is not a disease, that even though you can feel quite ill, depression itself is not a disease, despite feeling physical symptoms such as lethargy, loss of appetite, vague feelings of unease, and so on. According to Fedouloff:

"*Depression is not* an inherited condition. Although bipolar disorder, or manic depression does have a genetic component, 'ordinarily' depression is not inherited.

Depression is not due to a chemical imbalance. Low serotonin is a symptom of depression, not a cause.

Depression is not caused by illness. If you are seriously ill or injured, you may experience feelings such as hopelessness. An undiagnosed condition may cause you similar symptoms of depression such as less energy, changes in sleeping patterns and worry a lot as you wonder what is wrong. However, less than 20 percent of depression is triggered by a medical condition.

Depression is not due to overproduction of stress hormones. Increased levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are a symptom of depression not a cause. When you constantly ponder your unhappy past experiences, you bring on an emotional arousal that increases the release of stress hormones.

Depression is not caused by bad experiences. Although a traumatic experience may be linked to the onset of depression, it is not a cause of depression. Many people experience severe trauma and loss without becoming depressed."

Now consider Fedouloff's view that depression is a certain way of behaving, about how you interpret reality, or your experiences. Depression is a particular emotional thinking style. Emotional arousal directly affects how you think and simplifies your thinking processes in a limiting way. When continued over time, she adds, this can lead you into a cycle of depressive thinking.

Each of us has a fighter within. It is this desire to fight that can give you the strength you need in your battle with depression.

My own depression began to dissipate once I learned how easy it was to overcome my faulty thinking by developing new critical thinking skills. I learned that I could challenge my negative thoughts and feelings, which then gave me hope that I could find the answers and the strength to overcome depression.

At first I didn't understand the importance of doing the research needed to find alternative options and solutions to the problems and challenges of life. Because I had never learned these skills, I had made decisions the best way I knew how: relying on feelings and intuition.

Without critical thinking skills, it was easy for me to be influenced by other people's opinions. Like me, you may find yourself listening to society and following society's norms instead of deciding for yourself what's best. We can too easily become followers and live in depression.

Our greatest glory consists not in never falling,
but in rising every time we fall.
CONFUCIUS

Resources

PsychologyToday.com has online self-tests to find out if you might have depression, and offers self-help tools.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/index.php?term=PTO-20030721-000002>

Psychologyinfo.com has a bookstore that lists self-help books, with titles ranging from addictions to stress management. The web site also offers a list of things you can do to help yourself deal with depression.

<http://psychologyinfo.com/bookstore/>

Talentdevelop.com is where celebrities talk about their depression.

<http://www.talentdevelop.com/index.html>

The National Institutes of Mental Health website provides additional information about depression.

<http://wwwfinimhfinih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm#ptdep7>

The National Mental Health Association's mission is to bring more awareness about depression.

<http://wwwfinmha.org/camh/index.cfm>

Wingofmadness.com is a web site where people express what living with depression feels like.

<http://blogs.wingofmadness.com/feel/index.php>

2

How Stress Affects Your Life

There is strong shadow where there is much light.
JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Stress can cause depression. We can reduce harmful stress by recognizing where it comes from and learning how to deal with it. Let's consider what stress is. Stress is pressure, constant worry, and anxiety. Our bodies feel it. But not all stress is harmful; our bodies are equipped with mechanisms, such as the flight-or-fight response, that help us make quick decisions when there is danger in our environment.

Changes in our daily lives can cause stress. Yet, everyone views change differently; what is stressful to one person may not be considered stressful by another. Some people view change as a challenge, some welcome change, and others perceive it as pressure or stress. When someone experiences change as pressure, too much of it can cause him to be overstressed.

Everyone's stress threshold is different, and what affects one person will not necessarily affect someone else to the same degree. A person who reaches his individual threshold will experience negative feelings such as worry, anger, and sadness. He'll feel overwhelmed, possibly helpless, and even defeated. Depression then settles in.

Certain environments and our experiences related to them can also cause us to feel stress. When someone lives or works in a continually stressful environment or state of mind, he or she can become depressed. Such environments can have a direct impact on self-esteem. When we feel defeated and can't immediately remove the stress, we may become negative about ourselves and our lives.

Whether one believes that depression is a medical disorder or not, it is clear that stress influences depression and that stress can be associated with the way a person thinks about the events in his life. My own depression was a result of the stress

inherent in my not having been taught either how to challenge my own thinking or how to make effective decisions. The longer I went without having these skills, the more stress built up in me, and the worse my symptoms became. I didn't start out by having panic attacks; these came gradually, over time, due to the stress arising from my unresolved issues.

Too much stress can damage the body. When exposed to high levels of stress, the body will attempt to protect itself by sending warnings such as sleep abnormalities and loss of concentration or memory. We may tire easily and feel a decrease in energy. Too much stress also affects appetite: we may overeat in an effort to increase feelings of comfort, or we may lose our appetite. Our brains are also affected by too much stress. Brain cells communicate with each other, and when exposed to high levels of stress, brain communications begin to fail. When communication fails, symptoms of depression become evident. Over long periods, stress will manifest in more serious health conditions such as persistent headaches, ulcers, rashes, high blood pressure, and even heart disease or stroke.

While stress and depression are not the same, they are related. When past events remain unresolved or we have unmet needs, stress and its associated negative thoughts and feelings can cause symptoms of depression. Its symptoms become more obvious the longer stress lingers.

This book addresses four interconnected stress factors that can be associated with depression. These stress factors caused my own depression. The first stress factor is poor problem-solving skills. The second is the unmet need for love. The third factor is low self-esteem. The last factor is the perception that life offers no meaning, purpose, direction, or means of fulfilling one's destiny.

Poor Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills are important because they enable us to solve the problems associated with our needs for love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Without these skills, life can become unbearably frustrating and bleak, and self-esteem may plummet.

Unmet Need for Love

Giving and receiving love is natural. When our relationships are solid, we feel accepted and loved. Relationships bring feelings of connection and the satisfaction of sharing life's experiences. We need these connections to be healthy in mind and body. Along with critical thinking, love is one of the best ways to alleviate depression. Feeling unloved and disconnected can cause depression. The less love and connection we experience, the more we are apt to be stressed and depressed.

Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem is a major cause of depression. When low self-esteem cannot be resolved or elevated, negative feelings may pervade our existence. We may feel unloved and seek to be perceived as valuable through pleasing others. Once low self-esteem gets started, unless you break out of it, it can continue to get worse year by passing year. By working with this book, you are doing what it takes to break out of low self-esteem.

Lack of a Meaningful Life

When you feel that life is going in the wrong direction, your feelings of discontent act as a warning sign. A heavy sense of purposelessness and emptiness is a warning sign of depression.

Looking at the Wrong Problem

The last three factors we have been discussing–love, self-esteem, and a meaningful life–are interrelated. Without love we can't accept ourselves, and without self-acceptance we can't experience meaning and purpose. These factors have often been overlooked as contributors to the root problem of depression. Human beings have a natural need for love and when this need is unmet, the desire for it can become intense.

The search to find love can consume a person without his being aware of it. Before I was married to my first husband, I thought that if I could just be in a relationship, then all of my problems would go away. I failed to understand the reason for my relentless desire and attempt to find somebody to be a part of my life, and I strove to avoid the feelings associated with being alone. As a result, I did not address the real issues in my life.

Paying Attention to Your Thoughts and Feelings

Unless we learn how we think and how to challenge what we think, we will try to solve problems by relying on the knowledge we have acquired from past experiences. Although this type of knowledge helps us to know our world and navigate through life, it can also easily lead us to make poor decisions. If we lack problem-solving skills, we cannot make rational, logical decisions or find options that truly make sense for us and that will bring us peace. And when we avoid confronting our thoughts and feelings, we limit our capacity to discover the causes of our depression. Instead, we continue to live with depression while making hasty decisions and drawing faulty conclusions, all of which create more stress.

Exercise: A Stressful Time in Your Life

Write about a situation in your life where you were not able to solve a problem.

Express your feelings of worry, hopelessness, and stress because you couldn't solve the issue.

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Stress is in the eye of the beholder

Exercise: Your Stress Scale

The following table will give you the opportunity to evaluate the changes in your life, and see how much stress value each has. Note any event you have experienced within the last twelve months, then total up your score. This stress scale will help you identity the major stress factors in your life. Upon identifying your major stress factors, you can begin to look for ways to decrease the stress in your life.

1. Death of spouse 100
2. Divorce 60
3. Menopause 60
4. Separation from living partner 60
5. Jail term or probation 60
6. Death of close family member other than spouse 60
7. Serious personal injury or illness 45
8. Marriage or establishing life partnership 45
9. Fired at work 45
10. Marital or relationship reconciliation 40
11. Retirement 40
12. Change in health of immediate family member 40
13. Work more than 40 hours per week 35
14. Pregnancy or causing pregnancy 35
15. Sex difficulties 35
16. Gain of new family member 35
17. Business or work role change 35
18. Change in financial state 35
19. Death of a close friend 30

20. Change in number of arguments with spouse/partner 30
21. Mortgage or loan for a major purpose 25
22. Foreclosure of mortgage or loan 25
23. Sleep less than 8 hours per night 25
24. Change in responsibilities at work 25
25. Trouble with in-laws, or with children 25
26. Outstanding personal achievement 25
27. Spouse begins or stops work 20
28. Begin or end school 20
29. Change in living conditions (visitors in home, change in roommates, remodeling house) 20
30. Change in personal habits such as diet, exercise, smoking, etc. 20
31. Chronic allergies 20
32. Trouble with boss 20
33. Change in work hours or conditions 15
34. Moving to new residence 15
35. Presently in premenstrual period 15
36. Change in schools 15
37. Change in religious activities 15
38. Change in social activities (more or less than before) 15
39. Minor financial loan 10
40. Change in frequency of family get-togethers 10
41. Vacation 10
42. Presently in winter holiday season 10
43. Minor violation of the law 5

Total Score: ________________

(Reprinted from Journal of Psychosomatic Research,V2, Holmes and Rahe, Social Readjustment Rating Scale, 214 (1967) with permission from Elsevier Inc.)

If you have experienced a total stress score of 250 or greater within the last twelve months, you may be overstressed. Each person's level of stress tolerance is different. Persons with low stress tolerance may be overstressed at levels as low as 150.

This scale does not include the stressors created by lack of love, low self-esteem, or not having a fulfilling life. These factors would cause additional stress. When we learn to think more clearly, the stress factors do not have as dramatic an effect on us. Instead of situations

and new events seeming catastrophic, we can begin to see them as new opportunities or adventures, and turn them into positive, fruitful events and memories.

— TRY THIS! —

List additional stress factors and worries that you experience, which are not listed on the stress scale.

Stressful situations are most troublesome when we don't know how to resolve the stress factor. The following process suggests steps you can take to beat stress.

Understand the Stress

- Identify it. Determine what is causing the stress.

Deal with the Stress

- Face it.
- Plan a strategy for how you want to cope with it.
- Find ways to reduce the stress.

More Strategies for Coping with Stress

- Educate yourself on how to problem-solve.
- Find alternatives or options to the problem.
- Learn how to apply rational, critical thinking, and eliminate emotional thinking.
- Find the good in a bad situation.
- Set attainable goals.
- Develop listening skills. Practice listening for the most positive interpretations.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Thoroughly research unknown factors about the problem.
- Utilize your resources to find an answer.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Be patient.
- Take your time. Don't rush. Haste can cloud your judgment.
- Make sure people understand what it is that you're saying.
- Ask questions when unsure.
- Show integrity and concern.
- Take responsibility for your actions.
- Determine what the other person's motives and feelings are.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Learn to set boundaries for yourself.
- Practice good communication.
- Don't solve problems when angry—wait until you are calm.

- Learn to make the best out of a bad situation; turn lemons into lemonade.
- Don't let life just happen. Make things happen for you.
- Look at the bigger picture.
- Approach the situation with an open mind.
- Realize there's more than one way to get something done.
- Realize that you don't always have to be in control.
- Think before you act.

Ways to Reduce Stress

- Get involved in a mental or physical task. (Play a board game, clean out the closets, play a sport.)
- Take deep breaths.
- Do volunteer work.
- Reduce or avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Talk with somebody.
- Take a walk.
- Do something relaxing: listen to relaxing music, take a relaxing bath.

Our life is what our thoughts make it.

MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONIUS

Resources

Canadian Mental Health Association. *Coping with stress: Three ways to take off stress.* This site also lists books that teach one to cope with stress.
<www.cmha.ca/english/coping_with_stress/take_pressure_off.htm>

Burns, Steven. *How to Survive Unbearable Stress.*
<www.teachhealth.com>

Mildner, C. University of Iowa Counseling service. *Coping With Stress*.
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~ucs/copstress.html>

Part 2

3

Skill 1

Critical Thinking: Bringing Stress Under Control

What we see depends on mainly what we look for.
JOHN LUBBOCK

The decisions we make each day influence the direction of our lives. The more fluent and skillful we are at thinking critically, the more likely we are not only to make good decisions, and but also to experience less stress. You may think that critical thinking is simply common sense, but it is much more than that. It involves understanding your thought processes and their limitations. It is using that awareness to avoid the faulty thinking that leads to regrettable decisions.

You will be learning the skill of critical thinking in this chapter. Then you will apply this skill in the following chapters.

Recall that morning when I was starting my workout routine, and I began for the first time to apply certain skills to my thinking and feelings. I immediately noticed some relief from my debilitating feelings and, subsequently, from my problems. I began to feel hopeful that I could make it through my depression, and I also knew it would take some time to work through each emotion. In that way, I began my journey of applying critical thinking skills until I could identify each problem, where it was coming from, and how I was thinking about it.

What Is Critical Thinking?

This wonderful method for enlisting your mind's help to improve your life means changing or reorganizing your current knowledge by using specific, useful, and reliable thinking skills. In order to think critically, you must be consciously aware of your thoughts and use specific skills in the thought process. Critical thinking includes two phases: Evaluation and Forming New Conclusions.

Evaluation consists of critiquing the information we have. We evaluate our analysis and the conclusions we formed. Then, with the most valid information, we form the most accurate conclusion. People form new conclusions in many ways, often unconsciously. Evaluating your conclusions and beginning to consciously choose the conclusions you form will help you better understand yourself and the way you feel.

What Is a Critical Thinker?

When problems seem impossible or hopeless to solve, it is easy to give up. Before I learned how to think critically, every problem deepened my sense of depression. The longer problems remained unsolved, the more helpless I felt. Those feelings poisoned every area of my life.

Once I began to understand how easily my unrecognized feelings distorted my ability to reason and make good judgments, I wanted to uncover my feelings and understand them. Using critical thinking helped me do that by enabling me to observe my problems in a new way, rather than simply react to my feelings. Critical thinking gave me the tools to be able to study my negative thoughts and feelings. This new way gave me power over my depression and more control over my life. I began to feel independent instead of helpless. Finally, I could reason out my own answers and feel good about the decisions I made.

Critical thinkers know the importance of taking time to challenge feelings instead of spontaneously reacting to them. Critical thinkers evaluate not only their thoughts and feelings, but also any outside influences and information. As a person who uses critical thinking daily, I want to understand my feelings because I now know how unacknowledged feelings can distort my judgment, how they can sabotage me. My feelings no longer solely guide my actions.

Critical thinkers are more able to recognize when their thinking is flawed and when they have jumped to conclusions. They can see the red flag signaling them to slow down and ask questions about the information they have; they know not to rush into decisions.

Therefore, critical thinkers are good at evaluating their own thoughts and feelings. They are able to concentrate, to reduce confusion, and to bring clarity through

reasoned thinking. Such people can recognize when their judgment is impaired, when they have jumped to a conclusion without proper or accurate information, and, therefore, may be about to make a flawed judgment.

Characteristics of People Who Excel at Critical Thinking

Truth-seeking: These people have a courageous desire for the best knowledge possible, even if such knowledge fails to support or undermines another person's pre-conceptions, beliefs, or self-interests.

Open-minded: These people are tolerant of different viewpoints. They self-monitor for possible biases.

Analytical: These people demand the application of reason and evidence. They are more alert to problematic situations and more inclined to anticipate consequences.

Systematic: These people value logic and are focused and diligent when approaching problems at all levels of complexity.

Self-Confident: These people trust their own reasoning skills and see themselves as good thinkers.

Inquisitive: These people are curious and eager to acquire knowledge and receive explanations, even when it is not immediately apparent how they can apply the new knowledge.

Cognitively Mature: These people don't mind taking quality time to make, suspend, or revise judgments because they know that multiple solutions can be acceptable and applied. (Permission by Jim and Connie Messina, www.Coping.org).

As you practice what you learn in this book, you'll learn how to become a good evaluator and how to listen to what you are thinking and feeling. Then you'll learn to evaluate your perceptions and make an informed conclusion.

Why Learn How to Think Critically?

When depression is related to thinking, it is often because of how certain experiences or situations are framed. Stated another way, the way we think about our experiences and attach meaning to them can lead to depression. As long as I continued to view my problems negatively and to blame others, I continued to think negatively and stayed stuck in the problem. But when I could repeat back in my mind what I had just thought and felt about the situation, and apply critical thinking skills, I began to challenge those negative thoughts and feelings. This forced me to look for alternatives to my thinking, which led to more truthful, logical solutions to my problems. I believe problems can be alleviated, once a person has these skills. I know from experience that

our troubling experiences are solvable when we use these skills, that we can gain a sense of control over life and discover a new self-confidence.

Many times we keep drawing the same conclusions over and over again—all based on past and now defunct information. Without effective thinking skills to help us challenge how we anchor situations, we just keep living our lives based on ancient history.

Unfortunately, many of us do not learn how to challenge our thinking because we weren't taught critical thinking skills. This is unfortunate, because our decisions have long-term effects. Many of us probably would have different lives today if we had learned this skill earlier.

Lifetime benefits accrue to critical thinkers who go beyond a self-centered world view to a wider, more expanded outlook on life. These skills help us to see situations from a new perspective and to make wiser choices. Critical thinking enhances academic performance: we learn to challenge information, regardless of the source. For example, I may read something and realize that it sounds good for that particular situation, but what about when applying it to another situation? It may not necessarily be as effective in all situations.

On the job, effective thinking skills improve communication and understanding, which enhances productivity. In personal daily life, critical thinking helps us to avoid making hasty, unwise decisions.

Although the topic is too large to cover fully in this book, I will provide a solid base so you can work through the ten steps that will enable you to overcome depression on your own.

Seek the Truth

Ideally, we always seek the truth because without it we can not make beneficial decisions. We don't want or need to do anything based on falsehood. Yet, we often overlook the truth, or deny it, in favor of believing what we see and feel. As a result, we find ourselves in all kinds of difficult and painful situations.

A few years ago my husband and I were in the market for a used vehicle. We wanted one that was only a few years old, with less than 75,000 miles on it. One Sunday we were looking through the classifieds on the Internet and ran across a picture of a car that looked like it fit our profile. My husband called the number in the ad and the man who answered the phone told him the details about the car. The salesperson used his best sales techniques and said, "You should come and take a look at it; it will be the best used car you can buy." So we drove to the car lot, and when we arrived, we asked the salesman where the vehicle was and then walked around it

looking for any signs of damage. The salesperson asked if we if we wanted to drive the car. Being a little anxious about driving it, we took the keys and drove the car down the street and back. Upon starting the car, however, we noticed that the engine sounded like it was having trouble turning over. Inside the vehicle, we noticed signs of some wear and tear. In person, the car didn't seem to match the description and picture we saw on the Internet. My husband asked the salesperson about the car's history and his opinion of its reliability. The salesperson told us that the vehicle had a brand new engine in it, and he'd put that in writing. He quickly got on the phone with another person to confirm that the engine had been recently installed and had low mileage, which was not the same mileage that the odometer in the car read. We pondered all this, but still felt we were missing some important information. We decided that we would think it over and get back to him the following morning, provided he would fax us the paperwork showing proof that the engine had indeed been replaced recently. We never did hear back from the salesman. This confirmed that the information we had heard was not reliable, and that we should not make a purchasing decision without all the facts.

I used to believe that everything I was told was the truth. Now I know that in any situation, I must step back and evaluate by being aware of a number of influences that might affect my reasoning. Once I am aware of these influences, I can use them as critical thinking tools to help arrive at conclusions and make decisions based on truth. These influences include:

1. Observation
2. Understanding and Defining Terms
3. Discernment: Fact Versus Opinion
4. Understanding Outside Influences
5. Awareness of Feelings

Observation

We draw conclusions and make judgments and decisions every day. In order to perform these tasks we have to think. That sounds simple enough. Yet, our brains perform many intricate functions during even the simplest thought.

Observing is the action of witnessing, of inspecting or taking note. For instance, the first time you ate chocolate ice cream, you tasted it and came to a conclusion as to whether you liked it or not. Then the next time you saw chocolate ice cream, you knew whether you wanted to buy it or not. By already having come to a conclusion about chocolate ice cream, today you can make a quick decision about whether or not to buy it.

Observation is the tool we use to identify the world around us. As we try to gain knowledge of the world, we believe that the information we take in is accurate. It forms our reality even if it's flawed.

When forming conclusions where others are involved in the situation, it is important to understand how people can think differently about the same thing. People will see things differently based on what is most familiar, memorable, and vivid to them. Therefore, people will have different ideas and opinions about the events in their lives because people have different experiences and see the world differently. We think critically when we remember that people will have different experiences and when we are open to hearing their experience from their unique perspective.

In addition, during the process of observing, differences can arise because of our own associations with words. When we taste an orange for the first time, we don't know what it is supposed to taste like. It may taste rotten, but for all we know it is supposed to taste rotten. Additionally, we have to think to know what word to use to describe a sensory experience. Although this sounds rather easy, it is a challenge for us to interpret at the same time as we are sensing. Take, for example, if you go into a burning building. In order to sense that the building is full of smoke, you have to stop thinking long enough to sense the smoke, either by sight or smell. Once you see or smell the smoke, you can resume the thinking process, interpreting the situation so you can come to a conclusion: Get out of the burning building!

Observation Requires Us to Perceive

When observing we use the process of perceiving. When we perceive, we identify, recognize, and pick out something. Once we complete this process, our minds are capable of storing this information and retrieving it quickly when needed. If we had to take the time to consciously complete this process for every decision, it would take us a long time to complete daily functions.

The process of information retrieval helps us move through the physical world more effectively and quickly. For example, I have learned many of the sounds around our home. Often while sleeping I am awakened by a certain noise, but because I recognize it I don't have to get up and check to see what it is. I can quickly fall back asleep. If it's a new noise, I can estimate its location and distance.

Observation and Feelings

While observing and interpreting the world around us, we attach feelings to what we observe. For example, if we walk into our house and smell cookies baking, we may feel comforted and happy to be home.

Feelings can also distort what we observe and interpret. If we are not careful, feelings can keep us from seeing things clearly, as they really are. Advertisers spend a lot of money studying the psychology of consumer buying habits and what influences buying decisions. Marketers are sophisticated about how to advertise in such a way that consumers blindly accept the ads as truth. They do this by manipulating our feelings so that we want to buy the product. When we are influenced by emotional appeals, we seldom seek out the facts. Diet commercials are great at doing this. The commercial portrays the actor or actress as though he or she has it all, including the perfect body, and we simply accept that we, too, need to have a perfect body. All logical reasoning goes out the window when we forget to think about the facts. We fail to consider whether the diet is safe. Have there been any adverse side effects? Will it really make me look like a million bucks? Will I have to stay on the diet for the rest of my life? Can I safely lose the weight in such a short period? Is there a better alternative for losing weight?

— TRY THIS! —

Next time you are watching television commercials, closely listen and watch for the words and pictures that are being used to evoke feelings intended to influence you to purchase the product. Analyze the words and determine if the advertisers are telling all sides of the story. Let's face the truth: Even if a commercial shows a beautiful model, next to whom are the words "You can look beautiful, too," most people are not going to look like the model when they use the product. After all, do you really want to look like that? Do you really need to be as skinny as the model? Is it a healthy weight, or is it just an image that creative advertising has made us feel is perfect?

Observation and Senses

When we rely on our senses alone to determine facts, we can be fooled. Our sense perceptions are limited when we are distracted or less alert. For example, how much do you actually remember while listening to a lecture that you find boring?

In addition to our five physical senses, we can also think of our feelings as senses. If a coworker gets fired, other employees may be extra sensitive about their own performance, in fear of losing their jobs. Yet, the probability that other employees will be fired is low unless the company is downsizing. Even though fear can help us to make right decisions, it can also contribute to flawed thinking.

Our feelings are real; they become our reality when associated with the world. Although we can be deceived when our feelings are wrong, we still continue to believe they are accurate.

Observation and Experience

In order to form a conclusion, we search for information. We can't come to a conclusion any other way. Usually, we decide what information we will base our conclusions upon without conscious awareness. By taking time to listen to ourselves, we can gain skill in hearing our thinking and determining what information we have based our conclusions on.

It is easiest to use information that we have already acquired from past experiences to form a new conclusion. As children we learned not to touch a hot stove, and we continued to use that information when near another hot stove. This type of experience is very helpful to us, but what if we observed and interpreted incorrectly? Do we continue to arrive at conclusions from this incorrect interpretation?

Barriers to Observation

A critical thinker is aware of the barriers to observation. Our ability to think clearly can be limited when a situation involves using several of our senses at the same time, and it is difficult to consider all aspects of a complex situation.

— TRY THIS! —

Take an object in the room or outside in the environment. Observe the object using all of your senses except one. If the object is a flower, for example, feel it, smell it, and touch it, without looking at it. What did you observe? How did you feel while observing the object?

While doing this exercise you may have found it difficult to slow down enough to notice and describe how you were using your senses and what you were feeling. This is because our senses operate at a much slower speed than our thinking. When slowing down to observe the flower, you might have felt uncomfortable and impatient. Yet, if you stay focused, you can increase your awareness of your feelings.

The late Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget defined thinking as "a thought process that allows us to organize our perception of an object or of the world." He suggested that during the process of observing, a marvelous mental mechanism organizes and pops information into "folders" from which it can be retrieved later.

We experience a level of discomfort if we cannot make sense of what we've observed and perceived. Piaget called this state of mind "disequilibrium." It all happens so quickly that we may not even recognize when we feel uncomfortable. There are times, also, when the observation process is incomplete because we don't have enough information to form a new conclusion, either from what we've observed or from our memories. However, once our minds make sense of our observations and perceptions, discomfort is no longer present.

Understanding and Defining Terms

Confusion about terms increases the likelihood that our observations will be faulty. For example, the word charge has various meanings. As a verb, it can mean to give a command or instruction. As a noun, it can refer to a person under someone else's authority, or it can refer to an expense or cost such as the charge applied to a credit card. By being aware of how we associate words, we can learn to communicate more effectively. When someone is speaking, we can ask for clarification, for an interpretation of a word, or we can look up a definition. We can also observe how a word makes us feel. How we feel about a word says a lot about the meaning we have given it.

— TRY THIS! —

Read a newspaper article or another type of print material that is of interest to you. Underline the nouns. Then go back and read the nouns you have underlined, and research the ones that strike you as interesting. Begin by asking yourself what the words mean to you, and then look the words up in the dictionary to find out how close your interpretation is to the real meaning. Many times, our personal meaning of a word comes from how we have experienced it, which may be slightly different from the dictionary definition. You may find that your understanding of the word was not as clear as you thought, or you may discover that your association with the word has come from your feelings about it.

More About Terms: Ambiguous Words

Ambiguous words are unclear, uncertain, or confusing. These can be hard to locate due to the fact that we may overlook the word precisely because we don't see the ambiguous meaning. A woman may say, "I like attractive men." Here the ambiguous word is attractive. To clarify what she means, we'd have to ask for her definition of attractive. Does it mean a man who is tall and slender, muscular, with a certain color of hair; or is she referring to how smart and compassionate he is?

The use of ambiguous words is especially prevalent in advertising. In American culture a tan body is generally perceived as sexually appealing. Ads for tanning salons or spray-on tans may read something like "Be sexy, get your tan today!" The word sexy is ambiguous in relation to getting a tan. Is a tan really sexy? Do you think it is sexy, or have you seen one too many ads that portray a tan as sexy? Some people view a tan as skin damage. Is that sexy? The word sexy is in the eye of the beholder, so to speak, and everyone has a different interpretation. With a keen eye, you can discover many ambiguous words in advertising, in news reports, and in conversation. Keep in mind that much of what you read and see is simply one person's opinion, and you will be more likely to notice ambiguous words that can lead you to make faulty judgments and conclusions.

— TRY THIS! —

Take the same article you used in the previous exercise and look for any ambiguous words or sentences.

Discernment: Fact or Opinion?

Part of critical thinking is discerning facts and opinions. When you can't tell fact from opinion, it creates a barrier to clear observation and can influence you to make faulty conclusions. Much of what we read in the media consists of the writer's own opinion. When we don't know all the facts, we can easily fall into the trap of blindly accepting what the person has to say.

An opinion is just that: it is someone's idea, based on their feelings or perceptions. It is often an estimation or judgment.

A fact is information that we have good reason to believe is the truth. Things become truths to us and become our reality because we have verified their reality through experience or observation. Something can also become known as fact after being tested and verified over time by several sources.

True facts are important to us because they help us determine reality. However, some "facts" are wrong, or false, because they consist of perceptions about what seems to be real. There are times when what are presented as facts do not provide accurate evidence or absolute certainty. Even within the field of science, you may find inaccuracies of measurement and human error. Determine which of the following are opinions and which are facts.

1. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.
2. The tallest mountain in the world is Mount Everest.
3. The food tastes bad in this restaurant.
4. He must have forgotten his books, as he didn't bring them to class.
5. Laura's Lotion will make you sexier.
6. The man must be nice since he said hello to me.
7. The football team will win this year; they just signed the best player in the league.
8. The family must be rich since they drive an expensive car.
9. The study shows that calcium helps people with poor memories.

You can see that items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are not facts; they are somebody's opinion.

In critical thinking, we become aware that an opinion isn't sufficient to base a decision on or form a conclusion about, until we are confident that it is based on reliable information. When we can discern fact from opinion, we can think for ourselves. This allows us to move from dependency to independence, as we gain the confidence to arrive at our own conclusions about issues and events.

Reliability of Facts

It may seem impossible to determine the reliability of facts, but there are a few methods that can help. Data can be verified by confirming it through another source. You can determine the data's degree of reliability by evaluating it for errors. You can ask questions: Was the data entered correctly? Could there be human bias? Does someone benefit from this data? When determining the reliability of a fact, it is significant to note whether it has remained constant over time and through repetition.

— TRY THIS! —

Consider how reliable information gained from the following sources would be.

- News reports
- Gossip and rumors
- Friend's opinion
- Advertisement
- New scientific discoveries
- Empirical studies
- Research
- Ideas different from mine

Read an article or listen to the news. Pick out what you think are people's opinions and what you think are reliable facts.

Facts:

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Opinions:

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Understanding Outside Influences

We often make choices because of the various influences in our lives. Before making a decision, we might ask others for advice, feeling that they know more than we do, they know what is right for us. Yet, relying on others keeps us from learning to rely on ourselves.

Imagine that you have recently begun investing in the stock market, and you bought 25 shares of a certain company. They are doing well and you want to invest more, but a friend and coworker recommends a high tech stock that is supposed to bring a 20 percent increase. Instead of researching the company, you rely on your friend's recommendation and your good feeling about buying this stock. A couple of months later the stock plummets, and you lose your money. Had you researched the firm, you might have discovered that it was considering a merger. This merger was not successful and the firm's profits made a steep downturn.

When we are unaware of the factors that influence our thinking, we are not aware of our faulty thinking. The list gives some key influencing factors.

1. Past experiences and decisions
2. Past beliefs
3. Values we decided on in the past
4. Emotions
5. Family
6. Friends and community
7. Media (movies, music, art, television, Internet, books, magazines)
8. Role models

Consider how these influences affect the way you think by asking yourself the following questions.

- Do I automatically accept what others tell me as fact, or do I analyze others' suggestions and determine whether they are right for me?
- Do outside influences affect the way I think? How much?
- Do other people have an interest in influencing my views and beliefs?
- Why do these people have their own interest in what I decide?

More on Factors that Influence Our Thinking

As we learn more about critical thinking, it becomes important to understand the vocabulary of thought. The more accurately we can name the ways in which we think, the better we understand ourselves and the easier it is to think clearly. Below are a few terms that describe factors that influence our thinking. As you read, consider decisions you have made in which these factors have come into play.

Fallacies

A fallacy is a flaw, such as a misleading notion or an erroneous belief, that makes an argument unsound or invalid. When reasoning, be careful of using fallacies.

Consider the following examples of fallacious thinking. The first two sentences reflect facts and the third is the conclusion drawn, which is conjecture only.

- Leana didn't say Hi to me today.
- Leana didn't acknowledge me in class yesterday.
- *Conclusion:* Leana must be upset with me.

- He didn't come to work yesterday.
- He missed a day of work last week.
- *Conclusion:* He will want more time off from work.

- I got fired from my last job.
- I got fired from my job before that.
- *Conclusion:* I will probably get fired from my current job.

Inferences

When we form a conclusion or make a judgment without enough information, we often make an inference to help us. When there is missing information, it is easy to fill in the blanks by second guessing and using imagination. Being based on imagination, inferences can easily be incorrect.

Say you go to the video store on your way home from work to rent a movie for yourself and your friend. You want to pick a movie that your friend will like, so you pick one out based on what you know about your friend and past movies that he's liked. You infer that your friend will like this one. Will your choice necessarily please your friend?

Inferences can easily lead us astray and into faulty thinking. When I was experiencing depression and viewing life in general as negative, it was easy for me to fill in missing data with negativity. For instance when I was having an argument with my husband, I remember thinking that because he was angry he must think badly of me, and I quickly inferred that he no longer loved me.

Examine the following picture.



This is a picture of a man sitting in a chair on a dock. All we can say about this man is that he is sitting in a chair with his arms stretched out. He is facing the water and the weather appears overcast. It must be fall or winter because some of the trees leaves have changed their color. We can see part of a laptop, but we don't know why it is there. We can guess that he was using his laptop and something happened that made him happy. We can guess about his age. Perhaps he is in his 30s.

We don't have enough information to draw an accurate conclusion, but we automatically begin to fill in the missing information with inferences. Are we always right? No. There could be other facts that we don't know. If we make a conclusion about the man, it is likely to be wrong.

Should we rely on our inferences? That depends on how much we know. It is useful to recognize the inferences we make, however. If we can catch ourselves inferring, we can challenge our thinking.

When I had the thought that my husband no longer loved me, instead of letting that thought make me feel sad, I stopped myself from letting it snowball into something horrible. I talked to my husband about how I felt. I challenged my own inference by seeking out information and truth. The more we can fuel our thinking with facts, the greater our knowledge and, ultimately, our satisfaction.

Reasoning

To reason is the process of calculating or interpreting what we've observed, so that we can draw conclusions and make judgments or inferences. There are different types of reasoning, a few of which are listed here.

- *Reasoning by using signs:* Making the assumption that a sign or symbol represents or indicates something specific. If you make a phone call and receive a busy signal, you assume that someone is already on the line. You take the sign, the busy signal, and infer that someone is on the phone. When reasoning from signs, make sure you have enough information to relate the sign to the inference. (Beware of stereotypes like *this author calls herself a feminist; therefore she hates men.*)
- *Cause and effect:* Inferring that one event causes another (I was late because my alarm didn't go off) or reasoning with the result in mind (If I don't study, I will fail the test). Here it is also important that you have enough information to link the events. Beware of assuming that things which happen sequentially are causally related (I got a sunburn because it's hot).
- *Reasoning by analogy:* Drawing a parallel between two similar events, people, or traits. This type of reasoning is based on comparisons. For example: If all mothers are women, and Ann is a mother, then Ann must be a woman. Be careful to always check analogies for validity, because these don't work backwards. Because Ann is a woman doesn't mean she's a mother.
- *Reasoning by example:* Basing conclusions on facts, illustrations, or cases. One example of this is conclusions drawn from the results of polls or surveys. When drawing conclusions, always ask yourself, "Do I have enough facts to support this?" For example, "Candidate X had a 60 percent approval rating in the spring; therefore, he will be elected in the fall" does not provide any information about the candidate's fall ratings. *(Credited to The Writing Center, University of Richmond)*

Faulty Reasoning

Although our ability to reason is generally very effective, there are times when our reasoning can cause us problems. The following is a list of faulty reasoning and some tools that we can use to help us identify when we might be influenced to reason incorrectly.

- *Unsupported generalizations:* Always make sure you have enough factual evidence to support your generalizations. Beware of words like *all* and *every*, unless you are 100 percent sure there are no exceptions. Do not rely on stereotypes.
- *Impressing by large numbers (the bandwagon argument):* Large numbers alone do not tell enough. Claims made on the basis of numbers need to be

evaluated on their own merits, because statistics can be misleading. For example, claiming that 75 out of 100 patients who used a new product enjoyed it does not tell the entire story.

- *Appeals based on authority:* This occurs when the named authority is not an expert on the issue at hand. For example, a famous actor may be an expert on the topic of acting, but we cannot take him to be an expert in other areas (like the best aspirin or medical advice).
- *False analogy:* This can result when your comparison is based on only one or two similarities. For example, "Hitler and Bach were both German men; therefore, they must be similar." It is often the case that the dissimilarities outweigh the similarities, so it is always important to examine all characteristics.
- *Linear thinking:* This results when you do not have enough information and reduce the question to terms that are too simplistic. This fallacy is often expressed by the terms *either* and *or*, providing only two sides or alternatives when more are possible. "We have to have the death penalty because otherwise all the murderers will be on the streets."
- *Circular reasoning:* This is when you try to prove a point by returning to the point itself. An example of this might be: "Homework is boring because it is so tedious." *Boring* and *tedious* mean just about the same thing, so no new information is provided.
- *Attacking the person:* This directs attention away from the argument at hand by attacking the personality of the individual involved. The person arguing ignores the issue and instead turns the focus to the credibility of his or her opponent. "Not only does Candidate X support abortion, but he's also been married four times."
- *Non-logical reasoning: Non sequitur* means "it does not follow"; this refers to conclusions that do not have logical connections to the evidence provided. In other words, you are assuming a connection between events that are disconnected and unrelated. "Violence in movies has a bad effect on children; therefore, no one should see violent movies."
- *Red Herring argument:* This is when the person arguing brings in a side issue that it not relevant to the debate. "She is a good doctor; she drives a great car and is really fun." *(Credited to The Writing Center, University of Richmond)*

Reasoning and Assumptions

We often take the information provided by our feelings and thoughts for granted; we assume they are accurate and rely on them when making quick decisions, and that's fine. Assumptions help us keep life simple. It is when we aren't aware that we are making assumptions, however, that our ability to apply critical thinking is compromised.

Assumptions are based on information gleaned from past experiences, feelings, and information, all of which can be biased and limited. Regardless of these limitations, we still make assumptions, and everyone sometimes makes faulty assumptions. The following shows how assumptions can lead people to make wrong decisions.

How Assumptions Cause Us to Use Faulty Reasoning

- Pressures to make quick assumptions can cause us not to see hidden or unstated facts that are relevant to the situation.
- We take the information we feel, read, or hear for granted, without questioning its reliability.
- Assuming all our observations and assumptions are correct, we fail to consider any flaws, which can potentially cause us to be deceived.

Examples of assumptions:

- If I have a better job, people will admire me.
- If I am beautiful, I'll find someone to love me.
- If I drive a nice car, people will accept me.

When we are aware that we make subconscious assumptions all the time, we can help ourselves avoid making faulty assumptions. If we can learn to identify our assumptions and their motivating factors, we can stop ourselves from making faulty assumptions. In fact, we can gain greater knowledge and make even better conclusions. Identifying assumptions can seem difficult at first, because it requires us to stop our thought processes for a moment, determine what we are thinking, and identify what we are assuming.

Reasoning and Missing Information

Faulty assumptions in reasoning can result from not having enough information to make an accurate conclusion, and so they are a barrier to making sound judgments. We are often in a rush to perform daily tasks, and when we don't take time to think, we

don't really know whether the information that we have is correct, true, or complete. The less complete our information is, the more likely our assumptions will be false.

You can ask yourself the following questions when forming a conclusion: Is the information reliable? Is the information from a reliable source? What valuable information might I be overlooking? Does the information contain any biases? What perspective might other people have? What information do I need to make the best, most informed decision?

— TRY THIS! —

See if you can discover what is missing in the following recipes.

Double Chocolate Chip Cookies

- 1/2 cup Butter
- 1/3 cup Shortening
- 1 cup Sugar
- 1 Egg
- 1 tsp Vanilla
- 1/2 cup Unsweetened Cocoa Powder
- 1-3/4 cup All-Purpose Flour
- 1/2 tsp Baking Soda
- 1/4 tsp Baking powder
- 1 cup Semisweet Mini Chocolate Chips

Cream butter and sugar. Stir in egg and vanilla until well blended. Add flour, baking soda, powder, cocoa powder, and salt in a large bowl. Combine with butter and sugar. Beat just until blended. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop dough by teaspoonfuls onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 for 8-10 minutes or until centers are almost set. Makes 48 cookies.

Rice-Soy Bread (gluten free)

- 1 cup Soy flour, defatted
- 1/3 cup All purpose flour
- 1-1/4 cup Water
- 1 cup Brown rice flour
- 2 Tbs Sugar
- 1/2 tsp Salt

Mix flours. Mix honey and water. Add to flours, stirring well. Kneed for 5 minutes. Place dough into a lightly oiled or non-stick round or square baking pan. Bake at 325 degrees for 40 minutes until browned. Lightly butter top of loaf while it is cooking. Let cool on rack for 25 minutes before removing from pan.

In the cookie recipe, salt was missing. In the bread recipe, molasses was the missing ingredient. It may be harder to identify the missing ingredients in the Rice-Soy

Bread because this isn't a common dish for most people. The recipe for chocolate chip cookies is more familiar; therefore, even if we don't know all the ingredients, we can still estimate fairly accurately what ingredients need to be included. Because we are not as familiar with the rice recipe, however, we tend to take for granted that the recipe will include all the ingredients.

We have discussed several tools that we use to help us when observing and interpreting our world. To apply critical thinking to our personal problems, we can challenge our assumptions using the following criteria.

1. Identify the assumptions you've made.
2. Analyze the assumptions by checking to see if you have all the correct data.
3. Analyze the assumptions by identifying any errors in your observations. For instance, how reliable is the information? Are there biased opinions? Is there missing information?
4. Evaluate your interpretations for errors. Are the assumptions and inferences you've made the most accurate? What are you basing the assumption on; is it based on the correct information?

— TRY THIS! —

Locate a story in a magazine, newspaper, or on the Internet. Form your own conclusions and opinions about the story, then identify the following:

1. What did you observe about the situation?
2. What was your final conclusion about the situation?
3. What inferences and assumptions did you bring into the story?
4. How accurate was the data?
5. Do you have all the data needed to make an accurate conclusion, or was there missing information?
6. Did your conclusion contain biased information?
7. What other facts could you bring into the situation?
8. Have you had a similar experience that influenced how you arrived at your conclusion?
9. Were there any words you were not familiar with or which could have been vague?
10. Were there any outside influences that relate to your conclusion or opinion about the story?

11. Can you identify whether the storywriter brought any personal opinions into the story, and how did this influence your final opinion about it?
12. If you could rewrite any part of the story differently, with more accurate information, what would you change about it?

How might you view the story or situations differently than the storyteller does?

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Identify any flaws in reasoning.

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What are your take-aways from this chapter? What will you carry with you from here into your future? What did you learn that was most helpful, and how can you apply it to your life?

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In the next chapter, you will learn the second crucial skill that you can apply to overcome your depression and live a fulfilling, happy life.

Each problem that I solved became a rule which
served afterwards to solve other problems.
RENE DESCARTES

Resources

Browne, M. N., and Stuart Keeley. *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2004.

Coping.org is a good resource for information about critical thinking. <http://www.coping.org/write/percept/critical.htm>

Mayfield, Marlys. *Thinking for Yourself Text: Developing Critical Thinking Skills Through Reading and Writing*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2001.

4

Skill 2

Getting Control Of Your Life

We cannot direct the wind but we can adjust the sail.
ANONYMOUS

Making decisions is one of the most profound and potentially debilitating demands of life in the 21st century. Every day we confront hundreds of moments in which we must make decisions: what to eat for breakfast, where to shop, whether to watch TV or rent a movie, whether to exercise or socialize, whether to take the job that pays very well but has a long commute or the one that pays less but is 10 minutes from home, whether to have children, and where to send them to school. The task of decision making is endless.

Most of our decisions seem to be simple, have few consequences, and take less time than the blink of an eye. But others have an obvious, long-term impact on our lives and deserve time and attention. It is amazing that we are not trained as children how to make good decisions. Without this skill—and it can be learned—most of us find ourselves feeling overwhelmed by day-to-day living.

In this chapter, we will look at the fundamentals of making decisions, both good and bad. We will investigate how to make good decisions and why we make bad ones. This is important to understand in overcoming depression, because when we see how we made the bad decision to believe in faulty thinking, or perhaps jumped to a wrong conclusion, it is easier to change our flawed thinking.

Decision-Making Patterns

Once we develop a particular pattern of decision making, it becomes habitual. Most of us feel confident that our method allows us to make accurate decisions, so we rely on it alone. We take it for granted that one method can be applied to all situations, especially when life is going well.

But sometimes life doesn't go well, and the reason often can be traced to a faulty decision-making process (or no decision-making process, which is a decision unto itself), in which decisions are made based on inappropriate strategies. These could include avoidance, intuition, or procrastination.

If you ask the people you know, "How do you make decisions?", you will receive a variety of responses. Some people—most, perhaps—will not be able to answer the question. Others might say, "Well, I just simply decide what's best," or "I weigh the pros and cons." Few, if any, will actually know how they arrived at a decision because their process is largely unconscious; they never learned an effective decision-making process.

To develop good decision-making skills, you must first know your thinking style. Are you a rational thinker or an emotional thinker? Most of us are primarily one or the other. Rational thinkers tend to think in logical terms. A purely rational thinker looks at facts and figures, if necessary, and bases decisions and conclusions only on facts, without considering emotional factors. These factors often need to be considered, however, especially when other people are involved.

Emotional thinkers tend to think only in terms of how they feel.

The danger for both thinking styles is that each rules out the other; but the mind and heart need to work together to make effective decisions. In addition, at some point one's old thinking habits become obsolete. Time moves on. New information and new solutions are available, but if we rely on old patterns we become stuck and, at some point perhaps, obsolete. Our life stops working. This is a setup for depression.

Thinking Styles

People who depend and rely solely on their emotions run a high risk of making bad decisions. The emotional thinker might buy a car based on its great color, style, interior, or stereo system, or because of the feeling that is evoked when he sees the car. The fact that its engine needs a major overhaul somehow escapes his notice because when he drives the car, he feels so good. He just has to have that car!

An emotional thinker may make decisions based on hunches or intuition, which, for most of us, are unreliable. She might say, "I don't know. I just have a feeling that if I buy that $200 pair of shoes I'll feel better about myself," even though she would have

to charge those shoes to a credit card, on which she can only afford to make the minimum payment each month.

Of course intuition is sometimes reliable, but the results can be disastrous if we depend solely on it to make decisions. We need to be aware when we are relying on our intuition and feelings, so we can use them as part of an effective decision-making process.

I am a self-confessed former emotional thinker. I used to judge myself by the way I felt. If I felt happy and good, my self-esteem was high. If I was sad or had a bad day, I felt like a terrible person. I failed to take time to examine the facts or search for missing information in my conclusions about myself. This is typical for emotional thinkers.

Now let's consider the rational thinker. An over-reliance on logic prevents this person from seeing his and other people's perspectives and feelings. A good, sound decision embraces everyone's feelings, especially when the decision affects other people. Yet, rational thinkers often believe they know what is best for everyone. They do not want feelings to be involved in the decision-making process. Rational thinkers often believe that feelings are ridiculous or that emotional thinkers blow situations out of proportion. This attitude creates chaos in relationships and in all their affairs.

Another thinking style is No Style. This person does not make decisions, and either turns to others to tell him what to do or lets life "just happen." Letting other people make decisions for you can be ineffective, because the people you depend on may not have good decision-making skills, either. Even if the people you confide in can make good decisions for themselves, that doesn't mean they will know what is best for you. Letting life decide for you is effectively giving up, which I believe is not a viable option.

Decisions and Their Outcomes

Every decision has an outcome, and outcomes generally entail responsibility. When decisions are bad, these responsibilities can seem unbearable. When a couple decides to have a child, for example, short and long-term responsibilities automatically accompany that decision. In the long term, the parents are responsible for raising the child into adulthood, which requires time and money. Schooling has to be considered. There will be activities such as sports or dance to consider, and other expenses such as automobiles and insurance. These constitute a lifetime commitment. Short-term responsibilities include medical bills for the birth, and money for food, clothing, strollers, diapers, and bottles. The need for babysitters will arise. Then the grandchildren come.

Having a child places enormous responsibility on a couple, yet people often base

the decision to have children solely on irrational feelings and thinking. Some believe that having a child will solve marital problems, make one or both partners whole, or give them the ideal life. Failing to realize the cost of the decision in money, time, and emotion, many parents find themselves burdened after the birth and everyone suffers. Just as tragic, some people don't consciously make a decision, but still have children. Parenthood just happens to them and the child pays.

What Influences Your Decisions?

If you lack effective decision-making skills, you may be easily influenced by friends, the media, family, and others. Many of us compare our lives with what we see on television or in movies and accept what we see there as the standard to which we must aspire. Peer pressure also influences us. Teenagers are highly susceptible to peer pressure, especially around sexual activity.

On one hand, society tries to inform teenagers of the dangers of being sexually active; yet print and electronic media, including television, movies, and the Internet, give teenagers the idea that promiscuity is the key to social acceptance. We fail to educate teenagers about the risks of acting from emotions and about the downside of mimicking what they see in films and on TV. We don't take the time to teach them the consequences of living a precarious lifestyle, consequences such as pregnancy or contracting a sexually-transmitted disease.

A single decision can affect the rest of our life, and possibly our family's life, so we should do everything in our power to learn how to make effective decisions. A predominately emotional thinker can develop better decision-making skills by learning how to use good reasoning and how to recognize when emotions overtake the decision-making process. This enables us to apply critical thinking. Applying critical thinking to our feelings gives them a challenge, a challenge for accuracy. When good reasoning substantiates our feelings, we can rest assured that we'll be making an accurate decision. When emotions tell you to do something, test them by asking: "Are these emotions keeping me from considering good reasoning?"

On the other hand, if you are making a decision based only on logic, stop and consider the emotional aspects of the situation to ensure that you are taking your own feelings and others' concerns into account.

Tim's Story

Tim was unhappy at work. His employer had been asking him to work a lot of overtime lately. On top of this, Tim had played a major role in the firm by introducing a new computer software system that would contribute to greater profits. Yet Tim felt that his employer didn't recognize his full potential or appreciate the time and effort he

had put in. Finally, Tim decided that, since his employer didn't care about his contributions, he would quit his job. He was confident that he could easily find another job.

Based on that assumption, Tim walked into his boss's office and turned in his letter of resignation. A few days later, looking back at the situation, he realized he had made a terrible mistake. He had clearly based his decision purely on his feelings of anger towards his boss for not giving him more recognition. If Tim had applied some logical reasoning to the situation, he might have reacted differently. If he had talked to his boss about his concerns, he might have discovered that not only did the company recognize his efforts, but the company had plans to promote him and present him with an achievement award. Had Tim taken the time to look into the situation, this missing information might have altered his decision to quit. In addition, if he had taken the time to analyze the problem and look for alternative solutions, he would have recognized that his feelings were clouding his reason.

Since he reacted quickly, there was no time to find another position before he quit. He failed to consider what he might have to give up in order to have what he wanted: recognition from his boss. He failed to take the time to research the job market. His wrong decision affected him and his family emotionally and financially, since it took Tim longer than he expected to find a new job, and when he did, the new job was located in another city. Not only did Tim's emotional decision uproot his family, he had to pay relocation expenses and spend considerable time and energy finding a house in a safe neighborhood with good schools. This story illustrates how emotionally-based decisions can lead to undesirable negative consequences.

— TRY THIS! —

Think about the things that influence your own personal choices: feelings, knowledge, information, foresight, hindsight, advice, values, money, friends, family, etc. Make a list of these things on a piece of paper.

Think of a time when you were required to make a decision. Describe that scenario and then explain how you made your choice. Specify which items from your list were influential, and comment on how they affected your decision.

This next exercise will give you a good look at how you make decisions and the consequences of what you decide. For 24 hours, or for a specific choice, record your decisions and their direct consequences in the following Decision and Outcome log. Some consequences may not occur right away, so you may want to revisit this exercise later.

Decision

1. Bought a new car *(example)*
2. Decided to walk for 30 minutes every day (*example)*
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Outcome

1. I get to have a new car, but I also have the disadvantages of being a car owner: insurance payments, car payments, gas expenses, and maintenance costs. (*example*)
2. I had to give up my time, but I felt good after I exercised. I feel good knowing that I'm taking care of my health. My health is better. *(example)*
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Now reflect on whether you had to give something up in order to make each decision. Did the choice add any new responsibilities, for you or somebody else? How much time did it take? How much did it cost?

Next, consider:
What do I Have to Give Up in Order to Have It?

1. I have to work more hours to make the monthly payment on the car. *(example)*
2. I can't watch my favorite show (unless I get TIVO, which costs more money) because I'm exercising. *(example)*

3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Any New Responsibilities

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Time and Cost

1. Insurance increased, and now I have less time to spend with friends because I'm working longer hours. *(example)*
2. 30 minutes of my time *(example)*
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

After completing the log, reflect back over your choices and determine why you made the choices you did. What influences played a role in your decision making (feelings, intuition, advice, media, family or friends, past experiences, etc.)?

Common Decision-Making Errors

We all make mistakes and bad decisions from time to time. The advantage of critical thinking is that it helps us better understand when errors are influencing our decision-making process, which can prevent our making a bad decision. Let's now look at some common decision-making errors.

1. Overconfidence
2. Fear of regret
3. Conflict of interest
4. Mental shortcuts
5. Anchoring
6. Framing
7. Availability of information
8. Inaccurate information
9. Past experience
10. Oversimplification

1. Overconfidence

When we take for granted that our decision making is impeccable, there are three levels to consider. The first is overconfidence in matters that are inherently uncertain. A person may be overconfident that he is a safe driver, for example, and that car accidents won't happen to him. Or he may be overconfident when making investment decisions.

Second, we may be overconfident about the accuracy of information, especially when there is a strong desire for the situation to favor us. For example, someone gives you an investment tip and you invest without researching to verify that the tip is accurate.

Third is overconfidence in the accuracy of our risk assessment. Based on the outstanding growth of your side business over the last two years, you might quit your regular job to go full time in your own business before it is generating enough money to support you comfortably.

2. Fear of Regret

A second mental error is related to the fear of regretting your decision. For instance, a person may decide to stay with an abusive spouse due to fear of being alone.

3. Conflict of Interest

Without true confidence in our decisions, we may seek out only the information

that supports what we've already decided, ignoring or screening out of awareness information that challenges our decisions. After purchasing a computer, you might avoid advertisements for competing models because you're afraid you'll find a better deal and will feel stuck with the computer you purchased. When a particular outcome is important to you or when you want the outcome of a decision to maintain the status quo, you may also jump to a preconceived conclusion.

4. *Mental Shortcuts*

Mental shortcuts include the ideas of "Rule of Thumb" and stereotyping. Rule of Thumb can be a useful technique to make a fast decision or come up with a quick answer for a problem. When you use this technique, you retrieve memory data about similar situations and apply it to the current situation. Rule of Thumb judgments rely on having a general rule to apply to the situation. The problem with using Rule of Thumb is that our memory data or information can include bias, prejudice, or irrational thinking.

Stereotyping is another mental shortcut that entails judging based on previous experience. The brain assumes that things which share similar qualities are alike, and this allows us to stereotype. For instance, we make quick judgments about people by the style of clothing they wear or by their profession.

I remember when I was first learning how the mind categorizes and stereotypes when observing. Once I learned this, I saw how quickly the mind categorizes, makes a quick judgment and accepts it as the truth. One afternoon I was at a gas station and noticed a man walking toward the gas pumps. He was wearing old blue jeans with holes and his shirt was unbuttoned. He looked like he had been walking a long way. He was carrying a small gas can. I immediately thought that he was a poor man who must have broken down on the side of the road. Then I caught myself stereotyping the man and making inferences about the situation: he must have needed help, money, or to make a phone call.

Once I caught myself thinking this, I quickly started to think of other possibilities. Maybe what was going on was nothing like I had thought. I noticed that after the man filled the gas can, he walked around to the other side of the building, and there sat a lawn mower on the back of a truck.

My opinion of the man changed when I saw the other possible options.

Stereotyping is based on narrow judgments that discard even the possibility of a broader reality. When we go beyond stereotypes, however, we gain a more complete knowledge of a person or situation, so our decisions can be more effective.

5. *Anchoring*

As we reason and try to draw conclusions, we determine what pieces of informa-

tion to use that we then use as a reference point to form our conclusions. We can anchor decisions to a reference point based on previous experience, but if the reference point is faulty, that is, if it contains bias, the outcome will be faulty as well. A woman I know was bitten by a dog (reference point) when she was a teenager, and she developed a fear of dogs. Now, 25 years later, whenever she sees a dog she goes out of her way to avoid the dog (decision anchored to reference).

6. Framing

Framing is closely connected to anchoring. The reference point here is a firm belief or thought upon which decisions are based. For example, if you ask a vegetarian why he chooses not to eat meat, he might say that eating the flesh of animals is inhumane. How did he arrive at his decision? First he found some type of information (reference point). He may have read an article in a magazine about the way a cattle farm was treating the cattle inhumanely. He may have seen images of suffering cattle. With that information, he formed a strong belief not to eat beef again.

How we anchor and frame our decisions is based on what we believe and accept. Our decisions, as mentioned before, influence our lives: they affect how we function as parents and how we maintain friendships; they affect our financial status; they impact our effectiveness at work and how we make health-related decisions.

7. Availability of Information

We remember things that are especially vivid, such as a favorite time with a best friend or a family vacation. We will remember a robbery that took place in our neighborhood better than one we only read about in the newspaper. Our memory of events becomes less vivid as time elapses. When making decisions, remember that the mind will still try to use the information it remembers best, even as it becomes less vivid.

8. Inaccurate Information

Without accurate information, we will make erroneous decisions. We remember information according to how we experienced an event. People see things differently according to their past experiences. If people have different views about the same thing, how can you be sure about what is accurate?

Since everyone has their own opinions and perceptions, when making decisions we must take into account the extent that someone's opinion or perception is being brought into the information.

9. Past Experience

As we go through life, we remember experiences, events, and their outcomes. When we have decisions to make, we draw on these past experiences to predict outcomes. We may make the same decision over and over again in different circumstances, solely

because of something that happened or didn't happen in the past. This is unrealistic and leads to ineffective life decisions.

10. Oversimplification

Another cause of faulty decision making is the tendency to oversimplify a situation or event. It is easy to think we know the solution to a problem when, in fact, we are missing important information. When a situation is complex, it is easy to overlook important elements due to emotions such as fear, desire, or anger, or out of sheer laziness and impatience.

Reviewing Decision-Making Errors

Some, if not all, of the 10 errors we just reviewed play a part in every bad decision that we make. Tim's story is a perfect case in point. He anchored his decision to resign on information he thought he had: his employer didn't recognize his contributions to the company. That was his first error. His second error was overconfidence in his own knowledge, which played a major role in his decision to quit; it caused him to neglect researching the job market and not looking for his next job before quitting his current job. The third error in his decision making involved oversimplification and stereotyping, to a degree. Tim sized up his boss as a selfish and unappreciative employer who was only concerned with profits. Without all the information, Tim made a faulty, life-changing decision that affected not only him, but also his family.

Other Decision-Making Errors

"All or Nothing" thinking is another common error. In this type of extreme thinking, things are seen as being right or wrong, good or bad. There is no other consideration, no gray area.

Negative thinking can also cause bad decisions. It occurs when a situation or person is viewed narrowly and with the expectation of a negative outcome. Critical thinking overrides all these errors to allow for more positive outcomes.

Making Effective Decisions

Now that we have discussed some limitations that can adversely affect our decision making, let's look at some effective decision-making steps. Consider the following situations.

1. Shelly is about to graduate from high school and needs to decide where to attend college. But not only does she not know whether to attend a local college or go out of state, her parents think she should pay for half of her college expenses.
2. Dan has been out of work for the past four months. His situation has caused him to go further into debt, and he is in danger of losing his home. He recently

received job offers from two different corporations. One firm is willing to offer a higher salary, but the job will require him to work longer hours. The second firm can offer him better benefits and flex time, which would allow him to drive his children to school in the mornings.

Both of these scenarios pose a problem. Each problem has a number of potential solutions. How do we apply good judgment in order to make the best decision, to achieve the most positive or desirable outcome? In order for us to make accurate judgments, we must follow some simple steps.

1. Identify the Problem.

Referring back to Shelly's problem, her situation looks simple enough. All she needs to do is decide which college to attend. However, the fact that she will have to pay half of the cost of her education will eliminate some colleges. She has to pick a school based on her financial situation.

2. Identify the Objectives and Goals.

When you identify the problem, you should also recognize your desired goals. Shelly needs to pinpoint and identify why she wants to go to school and what criteria are most important to her. Her identified goals are to get an education, to find work with a reputable company, and to attend a prestigious school in hopes of getting a better job in the future. She also wants to go to school with her friends.

As you can see, Shelly has several different goals. They may all be important to her, but no matter how many goals she identifies, she will have to pick one or two goals that have priority. Then she can determine exactly what her real decision concerns. For the sake of this example, let's say that Shelly's top goal is to attend a prestigious college because she believes that she will get a better education and improve her job prospects. This helps to clarify her priorities. Yet, because she has to pay for half of the tuition, again we have a more complex situation.

3. Identify All Possible and Available Options.

Shelly will have to brainstorm the options available to her. She may not have enough information to know all of her options, so she will have to do some research on colleges, scholarship programs, and loans. She can talk to other people and to a counselor and do research through the Internet and college catalogs.

4. Evaluate Which Options Will Result in the Most Desirable Outcome.

Now must Shelly investigate her options by discerning the possible outcomes and consequences of each decision. She can do this by writing her options down and giving each one a numeric value, say, from 1 to 10. The lower the numeric value, the higher value the option has.

5. Determine the Information Needed Upon Which to Base a Decision.

Once Shelly identifies her available options—colleges that have scholarships or loans she might qualify for, and employers near those colleges that might hire her—she must then determine which information she wants to base her final decision on. Here, she needs to reevaluate whether the chosen option will definitely be the best solution to help her meet her goals. This is best done by writing down all the pros and cons of each option, such as cost, time, and long-term effects.

In this case, Shelly found a corporation near the school of her choice that has a work-study program, but she would have to work at the corporation for three years before becoming eligible to join the program. This option may have the most valuable outcome to her because she can gain work experience while waiting for the three years to pass. So she decides to base the decision on this particular factor.

6. Identify Any Faulty Reasoning.

Shelly needs to ask herself, "Have I made any faulty inferences and assumptions throughout the decision-making process?" She must check to see if she is basing her decision on any faulty reasoning such as overconfidence, fear of regret, or anchoring.

Let's analyze Shelly's process so far. Her first thinking error could be overconfidence: she assumes that the company with the work-study program is reputable because of its work-study program. However, this assumption may not be accurate since she is basing it on how she feels and what she wants, and on only one piece of information.

To avoid making a wrong decision, Shelly will have to do further research on the firm she is considering. She may discover that the firm has a high employee turnover rate or that production and sales have been declining. This could be a strong indication that the firm may soon run into financial problems, which would affect its position in the industry and possibly lead to actions such as cutting benefits like the work-study program, or even closing the plant.

At this point, Shelly must reevaluate her decision criteria. If she bases her decision on her initial assumption, that the company may help her meet her goals, then she will want to fill out a job application. However, if she does more research and finds that the company's financial situation is shaky, she may decide to look at other options and consider another way to reach her goal.

The second thinking error may be fear of regret. Shelly fears that if she does not get an education from a prestigious college, she will not be able to meet her long-term financial and personal goals. She infers that if she doesn't graduate from a well-known college, she may not be able to get a good job or be able to support herself. Yet, she has

to evaluate the truth about going to a prestigious college. Does she want to assume that the only way to get a good job is through an education at a top school?

Her third thinking error could be what she is basing her decision on. Perhaps Shelly is basing her decision on the assumption that she must have a college education in order to be financially successful. Yet, she hasn't really looked at other options for employment. Maybe she can start her own business or find a job where there's room for advancement, either of which could meet her financial and independence goals.

7. Compute the Optimal Decision.

After Shelly has completed looking at all her options and hidden assumptions, she can decide which opportunity will give her the best outcome to meet her goals.

— TRY THIS! —

Think of a major decision you have made recently or will have to make in the near future. Using the steps discussed above, write down the decision you made or need to make, and how you will work through the problem.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Identify the objectives and goals.
3. Identify all possible and available options.
4. Evaluate which options will result in the most desirable outcome.
5. Identify information you want to base your decision upon.
6. Identify any faulty reasoning.
7. Compute the optimal decision.

What inferences and assumptions can you identify that you made during your decision making?

A. ____

B. ____

C. ____

Can you identify faulty thinking with your inferences and assumptions, such as overconfidence, fear of regret, conflict of interest, rule of thumb, anchoring, framing, availability of information, accuracy of information, past experiences, or oversimplification?

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Factor in your faulty thinking, and apply any missing and newly accurate information to your reasoning. How does this change your final decision?

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After comparing the faulty thinking to the accurate information, compute your optimal decision.

____
____
____
____

Explain what your take-aways are from this chapter. What did you learn that was most helpful and how can you apply this knowledge to your life?

____
____
____
____

Decision-making skills are important for critical thinking. This system will empower you and keep you grounded in reality. You can apply these same techniques to depression. The following chapters give a detailed outline of the steps for overcoming depression.

Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life.
IMMANUEL KANT

Resources

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Part 3

5

Step 1
Your Feelings

Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found it was ourselves.
ROBERT FROST

Just as you feel its softness in your physical body when you touch the petal of a flower, or your finger feels burned when you accidentally touch the scorching heat of a whistling tea kettle, when you encounter certain events and situations, you feel them inside. It is easy to know that we feel burned when we touch fire or that we feel softness when we touch a flower petal, but it is not always so simple to know what we feel when we are faced with a highly-charged emotional situation. When we don't know or aren't sure what we're feeling, we run the risk of repeating behavior based on our feelings, and feeling even worse!

To overcome depression, you must learn to identify your feelings. Let's look more closely at how this works.

Lisa's Story

Lisa and her husband are having an argument. She yells at him and kicks the dog's empty bowl across the room. She feels out of control and tenses her body as the argument intensifies. Her husband is clenching his fists in anger. Lisa then decides not to talk at all and tries to avoid hearing what her husband is saying to her.

As the arguing escalates, both become so emotionally involved in justifying their side of the story that they cannot hear one another or even notice what the other person might be thinking or feeling. They can't see how they each are making the situation worse. They continue to argue and react to each other, their emotions running blindly and wildly.

This isn't a pleasant picture. If Lisa and her husband were aware of their own feelings, however, Lisa could tell her husband that she feels hurt when he acts as if he doesn't care how she feels. She might say, "I feel hurt because it appears that you don't love me."

Instead of responding defensively, her husband might say, "I didn't mean to hurt you," or "I do love you, and I also feel angry."

This type of arguing would be more productive because Lisa and her husband would establish that they understand each others' feelings and could then work together to resolve their problems. This type of arguing builds greater understanding, respect, and trust. As a result, their love could grow and strengthen.

If Lisa doesn't understand her feelings and her husband doesn't understand his, then their argument will go nowhere and their anger, hurt, and resentment will only grow and fester.

Depression can result from unresolved issues and frustration in relationships, which can become so deeply buried that the depressed person's feelings remain hidden. Not only do the uncomfortable feelings go deep underground, but eventually so do good feelings like happiness, tenderness, and love.

What Do You Feel?

Overcoming depression requires coming face-to-face with buried and forgotten feelings. This process requires courage, patience, and time. Consider it to be action research.

Action research is a term referring to a process used to address problems in a business. When the cause of the problem is not apparent, action research, using data collection and analysis, can reveal the cause and how to correct it.

We need to hear our feelings in order to control them. Once we hear them, we can begin to understand what they are trying to tell us. We need to know where these feelings come from, and why. We've seen that simply trying to change my thoughts didn't help me. In order to change my thoughts, I had to get to the root of them. I had to find the events (reference points) that were faulty and causing pain. Once I started to understand my feelings and how to evaluate and challenge them, I could begin to change my negative thoughts and feelings.

You can begin your own depression research by reflecting on how you felt in the past and paying close attention to what you think and feel now. Find quiet time alone with your journal. Allow yourself to think about situations that you tend to avoid and how you really feel about them. Form the intention to revisit any situation that you have consciously or unconsciously chosen to deny. Form the intention to identify the

thoughts and feelings you had in any situation that bothers you—just pick one. Write down what comes up for you. Journaling was helpful for me because it enabled me to release negative feelings and served as a forum for reflection and contemplation. You can respond to old thoughts and feelings in your journal. Later on, you can reread them and learn more about who you are, or see your progress. Seeing progress is important, because it is easy to feel as though we haven't made any.

Once you allow yourself to start writing, you may find memories flooding into your consciousness. You may want to keep a small notebook with you at all times to record the insights that arise once you begin to let out buried thoughts and feelings.

Remember, too, as you write, that there are no right or wrong feelings. The point is to begin to let your feelings and thoughts flow. Your thoughts and feelings are unique to you, and they are *for* you. This is how you develop self-awareness and begin to connect with yourself.

The Beauty of Self-Awareness

When life goes well, we feel good and welcome each day; when life seems hard or like a veil of tears, we would just as soon pull the covers over our head or run away. In either case, if we are not aware of how we are feeling—if we take the good times for granted and suffer blindly through the hard times—then we miss life. Human existence is not about feeling happy or sad—it is about experiencing the whole range of feelings that are available to us and enjoying the great panorama of life.

I used to live in a house that had wildflowers growing in the backyard. Every spring when I would walk out onto the back porch, I could smell the wildflowers. It was my favorite time of the year because I loved their fragrance. Yet, as far as I know, flowers can't smell their own sweet, delicious scent. Our feelings are like the fragrance in flowers: when we are unaware of them, we miss much of the sweetness of life.

If you are not in touch with your feelings, this section provides some helpful tools to help you connect with them.

Feelings: Their Range, Quality, and Degree

Below are words that can be associated with feelings and how you may experience them. As you read, take time to evaluate whether or not you are familiar with these feelings. Use your journal to write about what you find.

Feelings can stem from a felt sensation arising from our senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell, or touch—which can provoke a mood. This book is concerned with the inner feelings we experience in the chest or gut, such as fear, anger, or sadness when we reflect on an experience or event. We experience positive or negative inner feelings constantly, and much of the time we don't even realize it. These feelings are natural.

We were created to feel them. They help us by giving us important signals which, if we heed them, help us navigate happily and effectively through life.

The list below provides a brief list of feelings.

Positive Feelings

These include: love for someone, to be loved or cherished by others, pride in ourselves, to be wanted and respected by others, energy and motivation, a sense of accomplishment, sympathy for others, courage, hope, happiness, excitement, smartness, contentment, relief, peacefulness, creativity, jolliness, amusement, friendliness, comfort.

Negative Feelings

These include: unwanted, lethargic, depressed, miserable, cranky, discontent, indifferent, impatient, guilty, unimportant, regretful, troubled, helpless, dejected, angry, vengeful, vulnerable, hopeless, frustrated, disgusted.

Other Feelings

These include: eagerness, anxiety, unsure, regretful, shy, reluctant, confused, in awe, worried, surprised.

Feelings may be either positive or negative, but it doesn't follow that negative feelings are bad. Negative feelings can help you make good decisions. If you are feeling disgusted with the type of service your bank is giving you, you might just call and complain, after which you could get better service, which will make you happy.

As you go forward in this book and in your journey of overcoming depression, you will find yourself identifying your feelings using many of the terms above. As we've seen, to overcome depression you need clarity about your feelings. You can find resolution to all your problems when you understand your emotional state.

Block That Feeling: Why We Do It

Sigmund Freud, known by millions as the father of psychoanalysis, described how emotional insensitivity develops. He noted that society would be disrupted if everyone acted on impulse and expressed feelings spontaneously. In order to prevent disturbance, every society, to a degree, conspires against the expression of feelings.

In Western culture, institutions such as schools, businesses, and places of worship discourage the free expression of feelings. If someone is having a bad day, he or she is expected to snap out of it. Men especially are taught to hide their feelings and that crying, for example, is a sign of weakness. Young boys are often ridiculed for crying. Women, too, are discouraged from crying, and are often labeled overly emotional or hysterical if they express much emotion.

Given that expressing feelings is taboo, most of us develop our own style for

showing feelings; basically, we use avoidance. Some of us can talk about problems, but we don't understand the feelings associated with them; we can't describe *how* we feel, *why* we feel, or *what* causes our feelings, especially the uncomfortable ones.

At least a few of us believe it to be pointless and unnecessary to talk about feelings at all. Some of us who are afraid of feelings believe that to feel is to be flawed. Or, we think that if we show our feelings others will not understand or will run away from us. No one ever told us that feelings are important. When we are not in tune with our feelings, we may feel helpless because we don't understand the signals that our body and nervous system are sending us. We might know that we are upset, but we don't know why or what's causing it. This limits our ability to solve problems and the feelings remain bottled up inside, only to appear again in another equally uncomfortable situation.

In order to avoid our feelings, we may resort to any number of behaviors. We might avoid speaking in a situation; we may pretend to be happy when we are really feeling miserable, or we might become consumed with work, exercise, or eating.

— TRY THIS! —

Think about any of the tactics listed above that you tend to use to deal with or avoid uncomfortable situations or feelings. Capture in a journal for later self-reflection any thoughts and reactions you have to the exercise.

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If you want to learn how to identify what you are feeling during certain moments, you must actively listen to yourself. Learning about your feelings, you may experience excitement, embarrassment, and feelings of vulnerability. Although you may feel uncomfortable at first, you are taking a huge step toward overcoming depression. As you continue, it becomes satisfying and empowering to really know how you feel.

Communication Skills

Developing communication skills, particularly listening skills, requires us to know and understand our feelings. Listening to others and identifying their feelings can help us identify our own feelings. Again, in our society, it is rare for people to share what they really feel. However, it is equally rare for someone to listen intently enough to fully understand what another person is saying. Most people pretend to listen, but are merely marking time or formulating what they want to say next. Rarely do we realize

how devastating our not listening can be to the person who is talking. Over time, not being heard breeds depression, loneliness, frustration, psychological distress, and physical illness. If you feel that no one listens to you, you can begin to change that by learning how to listen to others.

Active listening is defined as the ability to identify the real meaning of someone's words and the feelings behind them. Research indicates that only 25 percent of oral communication is transmitted effectively. Just think: 75 percent of everything that is said is either ignored, misunderstood, or forgotten!

Active listening is difficult to master because our human tendency is to always think about what we're going to say when the other person finishes talking. It takes self-control and concentration to focus on the other person. It takes a strong desire to really communicate. If you sincerely want to become an active listener and break out of the prison of your depression, then read on.

Three Skills for Active Listening

1. *Paraphrasing*

A good paraphrase is concise and reflects the essential points of the speaker's message. In paraphrasing, you focus on the central message, the core statement. For example, a coworker might say, "Ben was crazy to quit his job." You could respond, "So, you believe that Ben shouldn't have quit his job?"

The key to effective paraphrasing is to cut through superfluous details, focus on the most significant statement, and repeat it back to the speaker. In the beginning, this may not feel natural; however, in our culture paraphrasing is fairly common. For example, the person taking your order at a restaurant will repeat your order back to you.

— TRY THIS! —

You will need a partner for this exercise. You and a partner will take turns practicing paraphrasing to one another. Assign listener and speaker roles. Start by having the speaker make a general statement to the listener. The listener then paraphrases what the speaker said. After each person does this, discuss whether the listener fully understood the speaker's meaning and feelings. Capture in a journal for later self-reflection any thoughts and reactions you have to the exercise.

2. *Reflecting Feelings*

In most conversations, it is important to understand how the speaker feels. Reflecting another person's feelings involves mirroring those feelings back to him. Again, we tend to limit this practice due to our focus on what we're going to say when the speaker stops talking.

Listeners can use the following techniques while learning to reflect feelings.

a. *Focus on the Feeling Words.* Pay attention to when someone expresses a feeling in words, and note the feeling. When you pay attention to the feeling word, you know how to respond to the person. For example, if someone says, "I felt badly that we missed the movie," you know the speaker isn't happy, and you can address the feeling in your response. If you are in some way to blame for missing the movie, you can apologize or share your own feeling about missing the movie.

   Because the suppression of feelings is so widespread in our society, most of us don't use feeling words at all during normal conversation. A good example of this is the supervisor who says, "The work you've done on this project is interesting." *Interesting* isn't a feeling and tells you nothing about whether the supervisor likes it or not. The only way you will know is to ask.

b. *How Would You Feel?* To gain insight into what someone is saying, ask yourself, "What would I be feeling now if I were in that person's situtIon?" While each person's emotional experience is unique and we can not know for sure what someone else is feeling, we can learn to understand our own inner reactions and make an educated guess about the other person's emotions.

— TRY THIS! —

Assign listener and speaker roles. Have the speaker make a statement. The listener will reflect back to the speaker the feelings the speaker may be feeling pertaining to the statement. After each person does this, discuss whether the listener accurately interpreted and reflected back the speaker's meaning and feelings.

3. *Questions: Open-Ended and Closed*

For our purposes, there are two kinds of questions: open-ended and closed. An open-ended question requires an explanation; a closed question asks for a yes or no answer. Asking open-ended questions will help when you want to really know and communicate with someone. For example: Closed Question: "Did you like the movie?" Open-Ended Question: "What did you think of the movie?"

Open-ended questions allow the exchange of thoughts and feelings. A closed question shuts the door on further discussion. For example, a coworker might say, "I don't like my job any longer." The listener who is interested in learning more might respond, "What is it about your job that you don't like?" The uninterested listener might say, simply, "Are you going to quit?"

Open-ended questions help the speaker to clarify his or her communication. Combined with paraphrasing, open-ended questioning is an effective tool.

— TRY THIS! —

With your partner again, have the speaker make a statement to the listener. Have the listener ask open-ended questions to help identify the speaker's feelings and the underlying issue behind the statement. After each person does this, discuss whether the listener's questions helped the speaker become clearer about what he or she was trying to communicate. Once you've practiced these skills, use them in your own personal situations and conversations with others.

Think back to an incident in your life that deeply affected you. Identify the words, the body language, and the tone of voice used by all parties involved. From the list below, select the feeling or feelings that you felt at that time, or identify other feelings not listed here. By practicing this exercise regularly, you can learn to recognize your feelings when problems arise.

- ❑ Sad
- ❑ Surprised
- ❑ Guilty
- ❑ Ashamed
- ❑ Rejected
- ❑ Angry
- ❑ Happy
- ❑ Frustrated
- ❑ Thrilled
- ❑ Helpless
- ❑ Proud
- ❑ Fearful

The next time you experience a strong feeling, stop what you are doing and begin to listen to or sense your feelings, using the skills you have learned here to identify what you feel. It may take several tries before you learn to accurately and readily identify your feelings. Remember that we cannot think about and identify emotions at the same time: we have to stop what we are doing in that moment and focus on the process. Capture in a journal your thoughts and reactions to the exercise for later self-reflection.

What are your take-aways from this chapter? What did you learn that was most helpful, and how can you apply it to your life?

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The greatest discovery of my generation is that man can alter his life simply by altering his attitude of mind.
JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS

Resources

Bolton, R. People Skills: *How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.

Kenner, Ellen. *DrKenner.com.* "The Rational Basis of Emotions." <www.drkenner.com/emotions.htm>

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6

STEP 2

WHAT'S BEHIND YOUR FEELINGS?

You've got to find the force inside you.
JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Our needs as human beings may vary, but we are amazingly alike when it comes to what the body, mind, and inner force, spirit you may call it, require for equilibrium and happiness. The wonder is that many people go through life without ever acknowledging their needs, and so these needs remain unmet and people continue to live unhappy lives.

When our needs are unfulfilled, symptoms such as confusion and emotional turmoil begin to show up in our lives. These feelings are part of an early-warning system, much like the warning lights on the dashboard of your car. When we ignore the warnings our emotions send us, we risk being ruled by them and we invite depression.

Earlier I mentioned that a feeling can be an inner sensation. In this case, we are concerned about deep and intense feelings that go unrecognized and become emotions. For instance, a dislike for something can turn into hatred, or liking something can turn into love.

Negative emotions predominate in depression, which is rooted in negativity. We want to uncover these deep negative emotions and see how they are connected to unmet needs and desires.

When we think about an event emotionally, we have come to a conclusion about it. We remember the event by the emotion. For instance, upon receiving the news that a person we know has passed away, we go through a thought process that results in emotion. At first, perhaps, we feel numb; but eventually we think about the person and our relationship with him, and emotion arises.

Let's say the deceased was a college friend. We might think about how that friend helped us to pass a difficult course by studying with us and explaining subject matter that we couldn't grasp on our own. As we think about and remember this, we feel warmth for the person, and then sadness. If we are still friends with the person, we will think about how we will be affected by our friend's death. If we had a close, loving relationship with the person, we may feel overwhelmed with fear and grief when we realize that the relationship is permanently gone from our lives. This is the process of emotion: Thought →Feeling →Emotion.

How do you feel when you get teased at work or school? Initially, you may feel embarrassed, frustrated, betrayed, or a little sad. Then when you have time to think about the incident in depth, you become even more frustrated and the feelings become deeper, perhaps turning into anger and a desire for revenge.

That day I was starting my workout routine, when I stopped and asked myself, "What is it that I'm really feeling?" I could pinpoint the feeling as sadness. Under the sadness, I could feel frustration and anger start to arise, and I noted that I felt deeply hurt, betrayed, and abandoned.

Unless we take the time to pay attention to our emotions, rather than pushing them away or running from them, we may never discover our needs, which are inextricably linked to those emotions.

Unrevealed Emotions Are Dominant Emotions

When we are unaware of our feelings or cover them up, we can be influenced by them to act blindly. Even though we may fail to acknowledge our feelings, they live within us, clamoring for attention, influencing our behavior and our responses to life. Unrevealed and suppressed emotions cause us to do things that obstruct happiness, for no matter how hard we try to suppress or avoid feelings, one way or another they will find release. This release may take the form of unhealthy habits such as overeating, binge eating, drinking, using drugs, smoking, gambling, overspending, and other unhealthy activities. We may cry, mope, or rage at others for what appears to be no reason at all.

Emotions that go unexamined for long periods of time place tremendous stress on our bodies. They make us sick and accelerate the aging process. Signs of suppressed emotions can include:

- Feeling sad or depressed with no obvious cause.
- Feeling tired a lot.
- Frequent stomach problems.
- Being unable to talk about your personal life.
- Pretending to others that you are happy when really you feel miserable.

Shine a Light on Your Feeling: Techniques

Only when feelings are brought to consciousness can they be analyzed rationally. It takes practice and effort to know what you are feeling in any given moment, especially when you are in the habit of burying feelings. Below are some ways to approach coming to know your feelings.

Talk with Someone You Trust

Talking about problems can help you identify the feelings that fuel them. Talking with someone also can help you to feel supported.

Keep a Journal

When I captured my thoughts and feelings in a journal, either in writing or through drawing, I could express myself without fear of criticism or misinterpretation. When I was challenging my depression, I kept a small journal with me at all times. I'd be sure to write down when I felt a new feeling or had a thought that I didn't want to forget because it held a key that I knew would help me to better understand myself. At first the revelations came slowly, but when I began to really pay attention and write them down, it was as if I had released a dam. My feelings poured through me, sometimes more quickly than I could record.

Relaxation: A Necessity

Relaxation relieves stress and promotes mental clarity. When our minds are clouded by problems and we are under stress, our feelings and emotions may be confused and less easy to identify, so we tend not to question them. Conscious relaxation slows the body and mind down and allows us to tune in, simply to be. When we relax we can listen to and note the feelings and sensations in our body. We can notice how we feel emotionally.

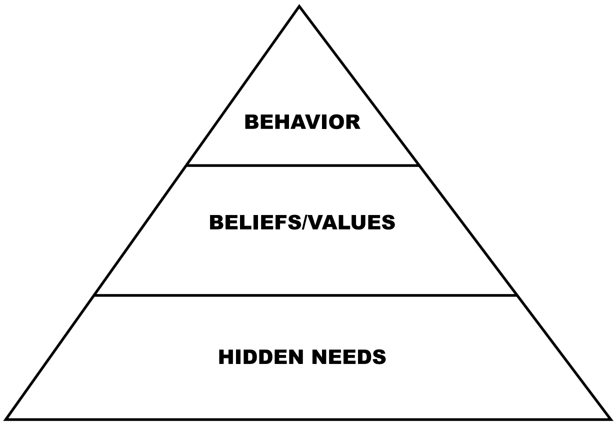
Listening to soothing music can reduce tension and help the mind relax. Taking a walk and spending time in nature are great stress busters. You may find that meditating or focusing on a higher power is a helpful method and promotes relaxation.

Experiment with these methods and find one or two that work for you. Perhaps you will incorporate all of them into your life, as you continue to reduce stress and become aware of your innermost feelings and emotions.

Uncover Your Hidden Needs and Start Finding Your Answers

All of the work thus far has been for the purpose of discovering your feelings. Your unacknowledged feelings and emotions hide your needs. Hidden, unmet needs will drive your behavior and sabotage success until you attend to them.

The pyramid below illustrates basic needs of humans and the levels at which they exist in each one of us.



Top Level:
Our behavior and actions

Middle Level:
Our beliefs and values drive our behavior and actions.

Lower Level:
Where our basic needs are hidden; these are the needs people try hardest to satisfy.

Let's look at how this pyramid works and what the levels show us.

Tom's Story

Top level: Tom dreamed for years of owning a new sports car. He saved and saved his money, and finally bought one.

Middle level: Tom believes: "If I have a sports car, people will look at me with awe. They will admire me, respect me, and think I'm somebody." Tom values material possessions and admiration from others.

Lower level: Tom's hidden need is recognition from others. Without it, he can't feel good about himself. This desire for recognition is linked to his unmet need for high self-esteem.

Abraham Maslow established the *Hierarchy of Needs* theory, which is widely recognized as a profound and fundamental truth in human development. Maslow defined a five-level framework of physical, emotional, and psychological needs that all humans possess. In his hierarchy, physiological needs—food, clothing, shelter—operate at the lowest level, followed by the needs for safety, for love, for esteem, and finally the need to self-actualize, which, according to Maslow, is the highest, most advanced human need.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's theory identifies everything that human beings require for fulfillment and the motivations for all that we do. During my recovery, I used this model as a tool to gain insight into my depression. As I reflected on the problems that caused depression, I found I could connect each one to a level in Maslow's hierarchy. That day in my workout room, after I identified my feelings, I understood each one and could describe them all more precisely than simply saying I was sad or upset or felt like crying. I asked myself, "Okay, Jill, why do you feel so much pain all the time?" I realized that I was suffering from an event that had happened earlier in my life. A certain person whom I felt should have been there for me wasn't, and as a result I didn't get to have the kind of relationship with this person that I longed for.

I then asked myself, "Why is this relationship so important to me? Why do I feel so desperate to have it?" I realized that this relationship could have made me feel loved earlier in my life. I could picture Maslow's hierarchy in my mind, and from the list of needs, the word *love* jumped out at me.

It was then I realized that for most of my life I had been stuck in the *love* level of the needs hierarchy because a particular person had not been an active part of my life and did not demonstrate love toward me. Because of the lack of relationship, I inferred that I was not loved by that person. I felt I needed this person's love in order to love and accept myself. I had been assuming this was true since I was a teenager.

Up to that moment, I had believed I was worthless because there hadn't been a loving bond. I felt I had been rejected most of my life by this person; therefore, I had rejected myself.

That was the day I realized that a lack of love was the factor causing most of my depression. Because of a lack of love, I had judged myself wrongly; as a result, I couldn't stop thinking negatively about myself. This experience was my reference point, the origin of my decision not to accept myself.

At the age of fifteen I chose to run away from home, making a decision that took away the security of having a roof over my head. This added stress snowballed into my making more wrong decisions, contributing to my low self-esteem. Looking again at Maslow's hierarchy of need, I could suddenly see that much of my behavior was prompted by the fear of not having shelter, a fundamental need. Here, my reference points were my experiences as a runaway.

Even today when new problems arise, I look for the basic need and work with it, using reasoning to resolve my difficulty. At times I'm still fearful that I might not be able to support myself in the future, but now that I know where the fear comes from and the truth about my fear, it overrides my negative feeling.

Maslow determined that each person has a primary need that influences her thinking and behavior. My primary need, after my need for security was met, was love and esteem. Once I could satisfy my need for love and esteem, I began to focus on achieving self-actualization. When I could understand my primary needs, I could see what caused my overwhelming emotions and depression, and apply critical thinking.

Understanding Your Needs

Maslow designated the needs in the pyramid as relating either to *deficiency* or to *being*. The four needs on the lower levels—physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem—are grouped together as deficiency needs, because when these are absent, we feel it as a lack.

The top level is termed as a *being* need, which has to do with existence itself, with the meaning of life, what we must discover in order to feel fulfilled. All the needs are important but, according to Maslow, this *being* need is the driving force.

I define self-actualization as the human need to realize the meaning and purpose of life and to feel that life is heading in its destined direction. Before we can self-actualize, all the needs on lower levels of the hierarchy must be met. Until all these needs are met, we will feel discontented. Once we can successfully satisfy basic needs, we can move toward growth and self-actualization.

Carl Rogers, who is known for his great contributions to the field of psychology, notes that every creature is moving toward self-actualization. It is the nature of life to grow and fulfill its destiny. Each one of us has a purpose and a destined road to travel.

Problems arise when we don't consciously know what is driving us or why—when we have no clear sense of purpose. Many people trudge through life believing they know what their needs are: a nice car, a big house, a fat paycheck. But are these really what the heart yearns for, or is the heart always whispering to us of a deeper need? Regardless of the wealth of toys and outer symbols of success we accumulate, we will always come up short where real happiness is concerned until we resolve our issues and reach the level of true fulfillment.

It's Easier to Satisfy Faulty Needs Than to See Our Deeper Needs

Carl Rogers noted that culture is a result of the drive for self-actualization. Since we need positive feedback from others, we allow ourselves to become vulnerable to the influences in our society. We may come to believe that we are valuable only when we like ourselves, leading us to dislike ourselves when we don't live up to society's standards. When we allow ourselves to be molded by society's norms, however, we become dependent on society to think for us.

Whenever we depend on something outside ourselves for self-esteem, it creates a vicious cycle of the opposite: low self-esteem. Caught in this cycle, our self-esteem depends on others recognizing our quality of work, abilities, appearance, or talents. But receiving recognition from others grants only momentary satisfaction, after which we again must focus on satisfying the need. The process continues for as long as we base our esteem upon other people. As the need can never be completely satisfied, we become more and more dependent upon others and experience more frustration as our self-esteem diminishes. Once caught in a cycle of low self-esteem, it's difficult step out of it—until we realize where true self-esteem comes from. Failing to see our deeper needs, we never allow ourselves to completely satisfy them.

Maria's Case

Maria strives to live an upper class lifestyle. She believes that status equals true happiness. She wants the best of everything and goes to great lengths to have it. She prizes her job because it allows her to feel important: she works for wealthy clients who know her name and socialize with her. Blindly seeking to satisfy her desire for the lifestyle she craves, she constantly abuses and takes advantage of others. She asks for favors and free items at work. She expects her employer to bend the rules in her favor. She justifies spending her employer's money for personal items. She asks her coworkers to wait on her and doesn't thank them. She pushes her work onto other employees. She takes things from the office and from other employees, not considering that this is stealing.

Maria would be devastated if she lost her job, because she could no longer socialize with the wealthy clients she idolizes. What she fails to recognize is that she has measured her self-esteem based on the recognition and attention she receives by working for a prestigious company. She doesn't see that her self-esteem is contingent upon the approval of and association with certain other people, and that the result is reckless, irresponsible, and potentially ruinous to her dreams.

A Closer Look at the Hierarchy of Needs, Level by Level

Physiological

Physiological needs are what Maslow called primary needs, those required for physical survival, including water, food, air, sleep, shelter, and clothing. Our lives are contingent upon meeting these needs; fulfilling them is a prerequisite for addressing higher needs. Maslow includes sex at this level; however, this need also can be associated with the need for intimacy, which can be associated with love.

Safety

Just as infants need shelter and protection, adults also need to feel safe in the world to be happy and live up to their potential.

Love

Love and the desire for unconditional acceptance by another is a natural human desire, and deeply rooted in our being. Love gives us a sense of belonging and connection. Most of us belong to some type of group—family, club, work, or religious—that fills this need. If we do not have such a group or family, we will go to great lengths to find one.

Esteem

The most important of the *esteem* needs is to have confidence in one's self. Confidence includes feeling important and having the ability to perform tasks. It also includes self-respect: the decision to accept yourself and decide that you are worthy of love.

We also desire to receive respect and acceptance from others. When we don't have self-confidence and rely solely on others for recognition and acceptance, we face a dilemma. Since no one can actually give us confidence, we deny it to ourselves while waiting for others to give it to us. As soon as we find confidence and respect within ourselves, then recognition and praise from others only enhances it.

Self-Actualization

The need to self-actualize is associated with the desire to express and fulfill our potential as human beings. Maslow refers to self-actualization as our ability to become the best that we can be and are meant to become. For example, a writer, to be happy in the purest sense, must write.

My own experience confirmed Maslow's theory: I couldn't pursue self-actualization until I first satisfied my needs for love and self-esteem. I couldn't even begin to go there until I had dealt with the lower levels. Initially, I didn't understand that I was trying to self-actualize; I just knew that I wasn't living the life that was meant for me. It felt like I was living someone else's life and that I couldn't find mine. I had a sense that I wasn't fulfilling my destiny.

When I know my lower needs are met, at least in general, and I sense I'm on the right track in life, that my life has meaning and purpose, then I can approach self-actualization. Believing that I'm on the road I'm destined to be on, I experience great joy and contentment.

It takes work to maintain the state of self-actualization, and I can't remain there always. One day I might feel I've reached my potential and am on top of the world,

while the next day, I may struggle to feel happy at all. As new problems and challenges arise, the quest for self-actualization may subside momentarily until the problem is resolved. Other days, I may struggle with my self-esteem and feel less fulfilled.

Some may argue that self-actualization is not a need that everyone has, but everyone is driven to acquire *something* in hopes of finding true happiness. I believe that, ultimately, each one of us desires self-actualization, though we may call it by different names.

Unmet Needs and the Risk of Depression

The longer a need goes unmet, the more likely it will turn into depression. By looking beyond the turmoil of our feelings, we can uncover the unmet need that underlies those feelings. The key is to look at problems squarely, identify the deep hidden emotions associated with them, and determine what essential needs ignite the emotions.

For a long time, I continued to become more bitter and hurt because the relationship I referred to earlier wasn't giving me what I believed I needed in order to feel genuinely loved. Because of this perceived lack of love, I put myself down all the time; I blamed myself for being a failure and believed that if this certain person couldn't love me, then nobody could ever love me. Over time, as new problems arose, things escalated from my being generally unhappy to the point where I hated myself and my life; I was experiencing panic attacks and anxiety that made me feel the world was spinning and out of control.

When you are depressed, look for the need you are seeking to meet, and you will find the root cause of your *disease*.

In the next chapters, we will begin to look more closely at three levels of Maslow's hierarchy—love, esteem, and self-actualization—and learn how to apply critical thinking to our habitual negative thoughts.

What are your take-aways from this chapter? What did you learn that was most helpful, and how can you apply it to your life?

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To be conscious that we are perceiving or thinking
is to be conscious of our existence.
ARISTOTLE

Resources

Abraham Maslow's books include: *Toward a Psychology of Being; Motivation and Personality*; and *The Further Reaches of Human Nature*.

Boeree, G. *Abraham Maslow. 1908-1970*.
<www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/maslow.html>

Gwynne, R. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.*
<http://webflutk.edu/~gwynne/maslow.htm>

Performance Unlimited. *Self-Actualization.*
<www.performance-unlimited.com/samain.htm>

7

Step 3

Your Need For Self-esteem

Once we accept our limits, we go beyond them.
ALBERT EINSTEIN

Your self-esteem, or how you perceive your worth in this world, makes the difference between leading a happy, productive life and one of sadness and depression. The good news is that you can cultivate positive, healthy self-esteem. The catch is that you have to work at it, with a firm intention. You will begin to consciously cultivate self-esteem by understanding how it works and the role it plays in your life.

Self-Esteem

We choose to believe who we are based on observations and feedback from others. Our observations are based on making comparisons between our sense of *self* and our environment or experiences. The views, beliefs, ideas, and concepts about ourselves that result from our comparisons, whether right or wrong, are processed and stored in the mental folders for self-esteem.

The Function of Self-Esteem

The word *self* as used here relates to who we are as we go through our day. This self helps us to function, to perform routine, daily tasks. Before attempting to perform a task, we access the self to determine if we know how to do it and what our efficiency level is. We can't make simple decisions without first communicating to self. When we get ready for work in the morning, self arises to help us decide what to wear, what color of shirt, what coat or hat. When we hop in the car to drive to work, self comes with us. "Can I get to work on time today? What will happen if I'm late? Will my boss be upset with me?" Self is always around. Self influences how we see, feel, and experience the world. Essentially, self is like a navigation system that we use

throughout the course of our life and can help us achieve our needs.

Problems arise when a negative view about self is stored in memory. When a negative self tries to navigate, we automatically form negative perceptions, observations, and conclusions about our current situations. The more negative views we store in memory, the more our problem of low self-esteem compounds. Furthermore, when we have a negative view about the self, we usually disbelieve in ourselves and our ability to perform certain tasks.

A person with a negative self-view may not feel competent about his ability to perform certain tasks at work. This person may believe that he is not capable of doing a good job, or may have unrealistic fears about meeting with a new group for lunch, meeting with the boss, or giving a presentation.

Living with low self-esteem feels like a persistent conversation with the voice of doom. It's negative chatter that the mind won't stop. It feels as though you are the only person in the world who has absolutely no control over life.

One of the major disadvantages of having low self-esteem is that it prevents us from achieving self-actualization. If we generally experience bad feelings, life always appears gloomy. If we feel gloomy all the time, how can we ever find peace and fulfillment? We are always down in the dumps, coming to negative conclusions about the world around us.

When my self-esteem was low, I had trouble making good decisions and setting goals. My introverted personality and constant negative thinking kept me from making good choices and being happy. Looking back, I'm sure that I would have made totally different choices in my teenage years and young adulthood had I had a positive self-esteem.

Once I changed my self-esteem to be generally positive, I began to perceive more and more things in my life as positive. I changed the reference points I had been using for self-esteem, so that they are no longer based on a consistently negative image. In this chapter, I will show you how you can do the same.

How Does Positive Self-Esteem Feel?

A person with a positive self-image believes that she is valued and is confident and competent when accomplishing daily tasks. For this person, a positive self rises to most occasions. Even if she can't perform a certain task, she doesn't see it as a sign of weakness, so her self-esteem is not easily damaged. This person feels confident going to meet a new group for lunch, meet with the boss, or give a presentation at work.

A person with healthy esteem does not hold a biased, negative self-image. Instead, she likes herself, approves of and accepts herself. She is comfortable with who she feels

herself to be inside. This person is rarely disappointed in herself and perceives herself to be worthy of respect.

A Look at Low Self-Esteem

After I overcame depression, I noticed how my self-esteem corresponded with certain personality traits and behaviors. For instance, when my self-esteem was low, I tended to be more shy and withdrawn, less social and outgoing. I had a general tendency to look at new and old situations in a negative way. I was afraid of change. I didn't believe in my abilities at work or at home, and I was so afraid of failing that I often wanted to run away or hide. I very rarely stayed at one job. The minute I felt I was messing something up, I ran.

People with low self-esteem share some common feelings, which they continue to relive so frequently that they despair of ever being happy. Some of these common feelings are explained below.

Rejection

Feelings of rejection often drive other feelings associated with low self-esteem. Feelings of rejection can cause an emotional chain reaction. For instance, if we have experienced rejection we may be scared to try new things, or to make and accept changes; we may fear others and fear their negative judgments. As a result, we will become withdrawn and prefer to be alone. Rejection can be associated with not feeling accepted by friends, peers, and even family members. It is associated with feeling that other people will not accept you unconditionally, just as you are.

Rejection can come in various forms: being criticized or ridiculed via name-calling, being shamed, having one's feelings ignored, receiving cruel punishment, receiving physical or sexual abuse, being abandoned, failing to receive appropriate affection and support, or failing to form a relationship.

Inadequacy

This feeling is associated with feeling insufficient or incapable, of not measuring up. It can lead to thoughts of not being good enough. When we feel inadequate, we may fear that we are not smart enough, rich enough, or beautiful enough to be accepted by others. This fear is often accompanied by the need to please others. A housewife may feel that if she's unable to keep the house clean at all times or if she doesn't have enough energy to run the household, her husband will see her as ineffective. She thinks that if he sees her as imperfect, he will no longer love her, so she wants to prevent her husband from seeing her in any other way than as being perfect. Because of low self-esteem, she is depending on her husband's acceptance instead of having her own positive sense of self-worth.

Unworthy

When we feel unworthy, we experience a lack of value or excellence. We feel we are beneath other people, that other people are more deserving and better than we are. We may believe that we are unworthy of success, of a loving spouse, family, or friends.

Unlovable

If we feel unlovable, we feel incapable or unworthy of giving and receiving love. We have thoughts such as "I'm inadequate," or "There is something wrong with me and therefore nobody will love me." Being rejected can lead to feeling unlovable. A child who doesn't feel accepted by his parents feels rejected and unloved. When this child grows up, he will always look to others for the unconditional acceptance and love he never received as a child. Perhaps he will search for that one person who will love him unconditionally. At the same time, he may be easily discouraged and embarrassed, and tend to shy away from people. He is likely to be overly critical of himself and dependant on others.

Incompetence

A lack of the physical or intellectual ability needed to perform a specific action results in feelings of general incompetence. Often, incompetence is a feeling that we are incapable of being a person of value. Many of us feel stupid and don't know how to do things the right way. We may think: It doesn't matter what I do, I can't do it right anyway.

Living with the feelings of rejection, inadequacy, unworthiness, incompetence, and feeling unloved usually adds up to depression.

— TRY THIS! —

Referring back to the list of feelings just discussed, answer the question: "Do I live with any of these feelings?" In the space provided below, describe which of these feelings you have experienced.

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Low Self-Esteem: Causes, Results, and Cure

Low self-esteem is interconnected with the need for love. When we feel a lack of love or support, it is easy to decide that those bad experiences are a reflection of who we are. Some people may have experienced lack of love or support in early life; for example, they may have had divorced parents, parents who were immature or narcissistic, or who couldn't or wouldn't spend time with them. Children depend upon

their parents for love and support, and when these are not present, children feel alone in the world. We learn how to value ourselves from our parents and other significant people in our young lives.

We need to feel connected to other people for the sake of emotional health and stability. When we do not have love and support in our early years, we may feel empty as adults and reject ourselves. We can easily feel that we aren't worthy of being valued, and as a result we can't ever quite seem to respect or accept ourselves. To fill the void and to find acceptance, we look to other people or substances and, as a result, we become dependent on people or things to satisfy our need for esteem. We can end up spending our whole lives trying to fill the void.

Self-Esteem and Faulty Emotions

When we don't know who we are, we may look to society for the answer. We unconsciously accept society's dictates about how to feel good about ourselves and gain acceptance from others. As a result, we come to base our esteem on our ability to achieve recognition, material possessions, approval, status, or attractiveness. There's nothing wrong with having material possessions, as long as your possessions are not the source of your self-esteem. If they are, you can strive all your life but you'll never have true self-esteem.

If you are looking for your self-worth in material things, ask yourself: "Why do I need to have this item?" If you base your self-worth on your appearance, ask questions such as: "Why do I have to have this jacket, hairstyle, hair color, or be a certain weight and size?" Be honest with yourself.

Examining your motives can be difficult, but when you can identify what you are basing your self-esteem on, you can overcome false assumptions. When you attempt to attain self-worth through material possessions, you will suffer disappointment in life and find your self-esteem diminishing. Trying to find yourself in this way provides only momentary fulfillment.

Now let's examine in detail some faulty assumptions that result from low self-esteem.

Money

Shawn has saved money over the years and made all the right investments. Since he has low self-esteem, however, he confuses money with self-worth. He believes that others admire and respect him because he has a lot of money. For Shawn, this form of acceptance brings satisfaction, but it is illusory; it brings only temporary satisfaction. Next time Shawn feels bad about himself, his false belief will kick in and he will think that if he can acquire more money, his self-worth will be restored. This is faulty, irrational thinking.

Outer Beauty

We live in a society obsessed with the concept of outer beauty. Many people falsely believe that if they can obtain society's ideal image of beauty, they will be accepted, recognized and, ultimately, loved. This in turn leads to the belief that if beauty is obtained, then one has permission to feel good about oneself.

In our society, the most beautiful people are viewed as the most successful and prestigious. Attractive people are hired more often and are paid more, regardless of their skill level or intelligence. Attractive children are treated more favorably and receive more positive attention. We perceive that attractive individuals have an advantage over those who are less attractive, and it seems, in fact, that they do. We perceive those who are the most attractive to be special, and this brings power and status.

Women especially tend to have intense concerns about appearance. False pressure to achieve this single accomplishment is constantly bombarding them, beginning in childhood. Girls grow up learning to base their identity on the idealized, beautiful women portrayed in fairytales and movies. Television, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, and superstars influence teenage girls and women to look and dress in a certain way. Our culture specifies the concept of beauty to conform to a particular, favored facial structure and body shape. It is this ideal image that many women long to achieve. Although our culture currently esteems and idolizes a thin but big-breasted shape, this wasn't always considered the ideal. Ideals of beauty have changed over the centuries and will continue to evolve in the future.

Consider the differences between the 1890s and now. In the 1890s, voluptuousness was valued as the ideal for beauty.

The era	The look
1890s	Plump, voluptuous
Early 20th century	Corseted, hourglass, "Gibson Girl" look
1920s	Flat-chested, slim-hipped, androgynous, with emphasis on heavy use of cosmetics
1930s & 1940s	Full-bodied, with emphasis on legs
1950s	Voluptuous and curvaceous
1960s to date	Thin, uncurvaceous (waif look)

(A Shifting Vision of Beauty. Health Canada (2002). Reproduced by permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005.)

You can go just about anywhere in the Western world and see pictures of the current ideal image. Marketers use it to entice women to buy products, often taking advantage of many women's self-hatred and distorted self-images. Unfortunately, their faulty reasoning has compelled women to believe, through the centuries, that they have to be beautiful in order to be happy, successful, and accepted.

When too much pressure to accomplish this ideal look overwhelms women and young girls, it traps them in a cycle of comparison and competition. They believe that if they can look better than other women, they'll have more value. For some women, beauty is like winning a gold medal at the Olympics or the Stanley Cup in hockey.

The quest for beauty plays a big role in the lifestyles of many women in Western culture. Yet even if a woman achieves her greatest goal, to be the most beautiful at the party or in the office, she will still not be completely satisfied. She will always be aware of flaws that she perceives keep her from totally attaining the ideal image. And there will always be some woman, somewhere, who is thinner and more attractive.

Comparing oneself to others wreaks havoc on self-esteem. It puts a strain on relationships and contributes to feelings of isolation and self-rejection. It creates a false feeling of rejection when she feels she is losing the comparison game. When women feel they don't measure up, they can believe they have failed in life.

Feelings of defeat can be overwhelming for some and may contribute to depression. This syndrome plays a role in eating disorders such as anorexia (starving oneself) and bulimia (binging and purging). Men also fall victim to these diseases, but not as often as women do.

This gender difference may reflect society's different expectations for men and women. Men are supposed to be strong and powerful. They feel ashamed of skinny bodies and want to be big and dominant. Women, on the other hand, are supposed to be tiny, waif-like, and thin in order to be considered sexy. More than half of teenaged girls are on diets, or think they should be on diets. A 1998 survey done in England by Exeter University studied 37,500 girls between 12 and 15 years old, and discovered that over half of them listed appearance as the biggest concern in their lives. More than half of these women suffered from low self-esteem and were also dieting.

Men with low self-esteem may decide they need a beautiful spouse to fulfill society's expectations and standards. A man may believe that if he attracts the most beautiful woman, she will have everything he wants: looks, brains, and a great personality. Movies reinforce this, since they frequently portray women as sex objects. Often a woman's only role in a movie is to stand around the men looking seductive. The portrayal of women as objects oppresses them by stereotyping and judging them solely

based on appearance. Appearance becomes the most important feature for women, looming over all other forms of achievement. In addition, the stereotypes and roles women play in movies influence the females in the audience to feel they have to behave in the same manner, since by doing so they, too, can gain the acknowledgment and acceptance of men.

Many young girls and women crash and burn because they cannot get away from the message that their bodies are less than perfect, that they are objects that need to be fixed. This becomes the sole method of measurement of their whole being.

Consider the following chart.

	AVERAGE WOMAN	**BARBIE**	**STORE MANNEQUIN**
Height	5' 4"	6' 0"	6' 0"
Weight	145 lbs.	101 lbs	Not available
Dress size	11 -14	4	6
Bust	36 - 37"	39"	34"
Waist	29 - 31"	19"	23"
Hips	40 - 42"	33"	34"

(Permission from ANRED: Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. <www.anred.com >)

It's faulty reasoning to believe that by making ourselves gorgeous, we can thus persuade others to accept us, and we can then control our lives and destiny. Believing that a person has to obtain beauty in order to be accepted leads us into another misconception.

Many women believe that they will attract love by making themselves look sexy. This also is faulty reasoning. This kind of love is superficial. Ask yourself: Do I want a man to love me based on my appearance, or would I rather he love me for who I am? Love based on appearance is a deception that sets both men and women up for trouble.

What happens to a relationship when the woman can't remain beautiful? What if she has a bad hair day or gains twenty pounds? The woman will begin to doubt whether her man loves her and whether she is worthy of love.

The truth is—and this can be difficult to accept—no one and nothing can fill the void of low self-esteem. Receiving love from others may seem to help for awhile, but even if you have a family of your own, the void is still there. Relying on others to give you self-esteem is a dream with no basis in reality. You can't wait for someone to come

along and love you before you decide to love and accept yourself. Waiting for other people to rescue you will only set you up for more depression and postpone your recovery.

Low Self-Esteem as an Ingredient in Depression

As you grew up, you had countless interactions with your parents, relatives, and friends. These interactions, along with advertising, the media, and popular culture, influenced how you viewed yourself and the world. The feedback you received via people's reactions told you what was expected of you, how others saw you, and what feelings you were permitted to express, and from this you either felt included or excluded. Thus to a large extent, your self-image is a consequence of your environment, consisting of others' feedback and your perceptions of that.

Low self-esteem contributes to depression. A low view of oneself and continual negative self-talk keeps the depressing thoughts and feelings flowing endlessly. We nurture an emotional tie to whatever the event was that caused us to feel depressed, and we direct those negative feelings inward.

In order to stop negative self-talk, begin to discover where your self-esteem comes from and what you use as a measurement of yourself. Are you measuring your self-worth according to what other people did or didn't do? If so, is this the proper tool for measuring your self-worth? In the end, you have to make the choice about whether to use positive, truthful facts about yourself to measure your esteem, or past events that revolve around what others did or didn't do.

How Low Self-Esteem Affects Our Lives

Low self-esteem affects relationships. Irrational feelings such as jealousy or suspicion are common. Anger can flare up when least expected. People with low self-esteem become so focused on themselves that they can't concentrate on other people's needs or on solving relationship problems.

Low self-esteem feeds fear. As poor self-esteem forms, so do feelings of self-rejection and we fear experiencing more rejection. We learn to protect ourselves from further rejection by several means: we blame others before they can blame us; we lose our temper; we try to make the other person feel guilty; we act impatient, emotional, or condescending; we terminate relationships. The tragedy is that we can be blinded by our low self-esteem, which causes us to misinterpret the actions of others.

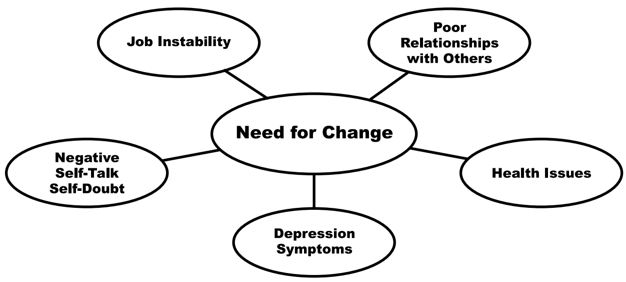
Low self-esteem affected every area of my life, as illustrated by the diagram below. I wasn't able to hold down a job, my relationships were stagnant, I experienced symptoms of depression, I constantly had negative thoughts about myself and life, and

eventually I started to have health issues such as panic attacks and heart palpitations.

Symptoms of Low Self-Esteem

- Panic attacks
- Anxiety
- Fear of being in an embarrassing or humiliating situation
- Tendency to addictive behaviors or habits—shopping, eating, alcohol—in hopes of comforting or deadening negative feelings
- Fear of making mistakes or experiencing more rejection
- Neediness, dependency
- Tendency to isolate and avoid others

My own symptoms of low self-esteem were manifest in various behaviors and health problems. The following chart identifies my symptoms. You may want to begin to identify your own.



— TRY THIS! —

Ask yourself the following questions. These types of questions can help you determine whether or not you suffer from low self-esteem.

1. Do I often look to others for approval?

❑ Yes ❑ No

2. Do I use a faulty method for trying to gain positive self-worth? What methods do I use?

❑ Yes ❑ No

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3. Do I often criticize the way I look?

❑ Yes ❑ No

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4. Do I quickly blame myself when other people in my life are not happy or are angry?

❑ Yes ❑ No

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5. Do I feel badly about myself when something in my life goes wrong?

❑ Yes ❑ No

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6. If something goes well in my life, do I attribute it to someone else's effort, or to luck or chance?

❑ Yes ❑ No

---

7. Do I often feel inadequate, incapable, or unloved?

❑ Yes ❑ No

List one or more events that caused you to feel bad about yourself.

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a. If someone doesn't like the way I have done something, do I feel bad about myself and angry at the other person?

❑ Yes ❑ No

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b. When at a social gathering, do I:

- ❑ Feel others are better than me?
- ❑ Feel others are judging me or staring at me?
- ❑ Feel I would rather get away from everyone?
- ❑ Wish I were somewhere else?
- ❑ Feel that I have to be perfect in front of people so they will accept me?
- ❑ Want a drink of alcohol to feel less nervous?
- ❑ Feel overwhelmed by feelings such as excitement, nervousness, and embarrassment?

c. Do I feel that I have to perform tasks perfectly or else somebody will not be happy?

❑ Yes ❑ No

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d. Am I often judgmental of myself?

❑ Yes ❑ No

---

e. Do I often feel upset about myself and my life?

❑ Yes ❑ No

---

f. Do I feel completely lonely at times, and that nobody cares about me?

❑ Yes ❑ No

---

g. Do I often think about my life and feel that I'll never be anybody and that my life will never be what I want it to be?

❑ Yes ❑ No

---

h. Does my self-esteem depend upon what others think of me or of how they feel about me?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Self-Esteem: Solving the Right Problem

Mark Leary coined the term *Sociometer*. He explains that self-esteem functions as a regulator or meter that is built into each of us. It operates by detecting threats of social rejection and by prompting us to avert them. When we sense a threat, we act to maintain or protect our sense of self-worth.

Consider Jessica, who doesn't like to attend social gatherings because she is afraid of being in groups or around people. When this fear arises, she knows how to quickly avoid the situation: she refuses the invitation, usually with excuses that she has to work, she doesn't feel well, or that she has other plans. This introverted reaction saves her from any possible rejection, ridicule, or judgment. Yet her behavior only makes her feel worse. Her apparent inability to extend herself to others (due to fear) confirms what she already believes about herself: that she is worthless, unloved, incompetent, and rejected. This self-rejection adds to depression.

It is surprisingly easy to overlook self-esteem as a main factor in depression. Once I went to my dentist because I was feeling pressure in my bottom front teeth. The dentist looked at my teeth and said, "You just need to have your teeth cleaned." I didn't buy this, so I went to another dentist who, after looking at my teeth, said, "You have a

wisdom tooth coming in at an angle, which is causing your other teeth to move." This experience demonstrates that it is easy to overlook the real problem. It applies to depression as well as dentistry.

The most researched topic in psychology during the 1980s was self-esteem. The research continues today, but we do know more about it. We know that self-esteem is a primary factor leading to success in life, as those who like and accept themselves generally enjoy both life and other people. Some studies suggest that in terms of general life satisfaction, people are more concerned with acquiring self-contentment than with achieving other goals such as a good family life, friendship, or increased income. Michael Kernis wrote about optimal self-esteem. Kernis explains that we are more likely to experience low self-esteem when we allow it to be anchored to our feelings about the self rather than to impartial evaluation of our various characteristics or specific qualities. This is because basing self-esteem on feelings makes self-worth contingent on how we perceive others' opinion of us. If we feel negative about ourselves, we reflect this negativity into our lives, causing stress and depression.

According to Kernis, optimal self-esteem stems from an individual's feelings of self-worth that arise naturally from three factors.

1. Managing life challenges successfully.
2. The true, authentic self is the main source for believing in oneself.
3. Individuals are esteemed for who they are, not for achievements.

Using this definition, we can strive for optimal self-esteem by minimizing strong dependency upon others, relying on specific characteristics or specific qualities about ourselves that make our esteem more stable, and learning to think critically so we can make more effective and desirable decisions, which enhance our level of competence. Self-esteem is the basis for self-love, and loving ourselves in turn helps to satisfy our need for existence and purpose.

Benefits of Overcoming Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem causes us to become so self-absorbed that we can not move forward. This low self-esteem creates a bubble around us. It is as if we are always just a little bit removed from others and from our environment. The only way to break out of this bubble is to raise our self-esteem. Once we do this, the quality of our life improves, and we can relate to others and participate wholeheartedly in life.

Once I began to feel better about myself, a long period of stagnation came to an end. For the first time, I trusted and respected myself. I became more outgoing and less afraid to try new things. I dropped my resistance to change. I saw my personality

transform from negative to positive, and I became less dependent upon others. I began to feel that I was in the driver's seat of my life.

Not only did I experience personal growth, but my relationships were more satisfying because I was able to give unconditional love and acceptance to those closest to me. I became more aware of others' needs and wanted to help the people in my life have good experiences and see their needs met.

Personality, Behavior, and Low Self-Esteem

If acquiring a positive self-image is so wonderful, why is it so hard to change, and why can't more people do it? I learned that negative thoughts are automatic; therefore, I didn't even realize when I was thinking negatively. I have come to recognize how fast and easily I formed negative, faulty conclusions about myself, which were based on perceptions from past experiences. I then began to question how this type of thinking could enter the mind so quickly. How could negative thoughts appear automatically, out of nowhere? And why did I seem to have no control over them? When the mind stores negative thoughts and images, they will continually produce negative results. This cycle continues until the stored negative thoughts are changed.

The real improvement in my self-esteem came from self-knowledge gained from observation of my behavior. I saw that I had developed patterns of behavior that were based on negative thinking, which I thought would enhance my self-image and satisfy my unmet needs. These behaviors didn't work, but the intention was good. It was a defense mechanism that protected me from rejection. We ought never to feel guilty or bad about our behaviors. We can simply be aware of them so that we don't keep perpetuating them in hopes of gaining acceptance.

Some behaviors that arise from negative thinking and having unmet needs have been described by Connie and Jim Messina, as follows.

People-Pleasing Personality

This behavior is a form of protection from the constant fear of failure. People pleasers worry that others will recognize their failings and see how unworthy they are (or believe themselves to be). If people pleasers cannot make others happy, they are disappointed. They are critical of how well they are doing in their personal lives, and if they are not successful quickly, they blame and berate themselves. People pleasers believe that they must be liked by everyone and must do whatever it takes to avoid confrontation of any kind.

Rescuing Personality

Rescuers feel highly motivated to help others. Even though they like to discuss people's problems openly, they feel burdened by helping others and hearing their

problems. They may feel anger or resentment about having to continually help people with their problems. They fear being misjudged by others or feel guilty when they don't help someone else. The rescuer becomes so overwhelmed by his efforts to help others that he often ignores his own needs. The rescuer feels at fault when his efforts fail to help others. Rescuers feel unappreciated when they are not recognized for their good deeds.

Looking-Good Personality

These people put up a front to look good in front of others. They want to be recognized for their efforts, accomplishments, and abilities. They are naturally sociable and appear to have high self-esteem, yet at the sate time, they really feel lonely and isolated. They have a hard time accepting their accomplishments, but keep trying to be perfect in all their tasks and relationships. They deny having any problems and try to convince others that they are not troubled, but have it all together and are independent (not in need of anyone's help). They may withdraw from conflict or other circumstances that make them feel unworthy of love and acceptance.

Acting-Out Personality

These people are trying to satisfy their unmet needs by acting out their feelings in negative ways. They may get into trouble or mischief, runaway, use drugs or alcohol, rebel, have a lack of motivation, fail at work or school, and can be disagreeable with others. At the same time, these people have bottled up their emotions and have emotionally withdrawn from their family and interactions with other people and as a result, they feel a strong sense of rejection and a need to belong.

Non-Feeling Personality

These people are disassociated from their feelings and basically feel nothing. They like to get along with others and are easygoing on the surface. They are friendly, sociable, and easily liked by others. They are able to fit into a variety of social situations. Since nothing bothers them, they often ask what all the fuss is about and become easily annoyed at people who are emotional or who express feelings. Often they think others are taking advantage of them, yet they hesitate to stand up for themselves. They often think they are being victimized by people who are overly verbal. They are prone to resist when others push them to make a decision.

Troubled-Person Personality

These people fear that someone else will discover their problems; they feel guilty for having problems and ashamed they can't solve them. They fear they will lose everything important to them, which inhibits their ability to make decisions. They might feel nobody loves them and that if they were loved, their life would be better.

They need to have things in perfect order at home or at work. They feel worthless when others point out their failings and problems. This makes them repress their feelings or deny their problems.

Entertaining Personality

This type of personality has feelings of helplessness and confusion, and fears being alone. Frightened and anxious about the troubles and problems in their lives, people with this personality gain temporary satisfaction from receiving attention. They feel unimportant and take things too personally. They are afraid to look within and feel guilty for not doing enough to reduce the tension in their lives. Because they seek attention, they will often be manipulative and try to control situations; they will attempt to gain the spotlight. They are unable to establish close, intimate relationships, which leaves them feeling more isolated, lonely, and shy.

Pulling-In Personality

These people like to be independent. They may be extremely shy, keep to themselves, and avoid social engagements. They are materialistic. They often have feelings of being an outsider and are confused about what is occurring in their life. They feel unimportant. A person with this personality type becomes isolated, alone, fearful of social interaction and of rejection, and is hurt when he feels ignored or left out. These people lack close, long-lasting friendships and personal relationships. They find things to do that will help them escape into a fantasy world, such as TV, music, books, etc.

Enabling Personality

This personality protects others from the consequences of their own actions. They attempt to save others from feeling intense emotional pain. They may find themselves assuming responsibility for the troubled person, but will doubt themselves and their own sanity. They see the problem as the fault of others, whom they blame for their troubles. They feel trapped in the problems of the troubled person. They often feel powerless to change a situation. They often become immobilized by fear, insecurity, and mistrust if they are not successful in getting help for the troubled people in their lives. They can wear themselves down so much that they suffer stress-related illnesses. They may spend their lives seeking revenge against the troubled people whom they tried to reform and couldn't.

Solving the Problems of Depression and Low Self-Esteem

People who have positive self-esteem draw positive conclusions about life's situations, and people who have low self-esteem draw negative conclusions. Every day, you form conclusions that are either positive or negative. You hold the key to your own self-esteem. Other people don't hold that for you, nor can they pass it on to you like the torch being passed at the Olympics.

Since you hold the key, you have the power to change how you perceive yourself. You have to decide that you will accept yourself regardless of what other people have done, what other people think, and what happened in the past or will happen in the future. Faulty, emotional thinking causes you to live in a state of mind where you accept yourself only if someone else does. Such thinking makes your self-esteem dependent upon other people. If you see yourself in a negative way, don't count on waking up one morning as a new person with a new life. You have to work to change it. Change takes effort.

The good news is that since you have the power to change your life, all you have to do is make the decision that you want to make a change. For starters, you have to identify what you are basing your self-esteem on. It is easy to remember past experiences that made you feel lousy. Maybe a friend betrayed you, or a boyfriend or girlfriend cheated on you. All of us have at some time experienced conflicts in a relationship. A marriage may have gone wrong, or a boss yelled at us and then told us not to bother coming back to work. We may not have fit in at work or with friends. Any kind of negative memories can be tied to low self-esteem.

Take time to ponder what, exactly, you are using to measure your self-esteem.

The True Nature of Success

Once I started to change my low self-esteem to positive, I began to feel that I was more successful in my life. What one person sees as success will not be the same for another person. Some people feel that having many material possessions or an executive position will make them happy. Yet, trying to gain or accomplish outer success ignores the real source of happiness that our heart longs for: love, self-acceptance, and self-actualization. Loving and accepting oneself gives inner peace and contentment that worldly objects cannot provide. This type of success generates positive feelings.

I have spent so much time worrying about how I was going to acquire more and more material possessions that the whole world could have passed me by and I wouldn't have noticed. I was so consumed with worry about having material possessions and competing with society, friends, and neighbors that I failed to see the bigger picture.

I remember when my oldest son was four years old. His father and I put him in peewee baseball so he'd be like the other kids, learning a sport and being an achiever. Once a week we'd drive him to practice, where we'd sit in the stands and watch him standing out in the field and staring up at the sky. It didn't matter to us that he wasn't having fun, because the important thing was that we could tell others, "Yeah, my son plays baseball." Of course, all parents want to be able to brag about their children's

success and achievements. It's not fair to the child, however, when he is forced into something so the parents can have bragging rights, so when friends come over for dinner the parents can use his achievements to feel good about themselves. Are we really letting our children excel when we control their recreational time?

When I changed the way I felt about myself, I began to feel alive; I could finally breathe and experience the wonder of life. I felt as if my inner self awakened, that it had been sleeping before. I woke up each morning motivated and excited to start the day, and I wasn't overly concerned with material possessions or competing with others. I felt confident that it was going to be a good day, and that the little trials and adversity wouldn't easily distract me. I stopped feeling that my life was a disaster, or that I was any less of a person because I encountered difficulties. This all followed from taking time to understand myself, the things that make me happy, and the things that make me sad.

When we moved to Seattle in 1996, my husband and I used to drive around the area just to experience its beauty. We found several places that we especially loved—Mukilteo was one. We'd walk the beach, sit on a log, and look out at the water and the island across the way. We loved to walk on the wooded trails and drive up through the mountains. Slowly I began to realize that I was falling in love with the area because of the way it made me feel. I felt at one with nature and the environment. I had never felt so full of life before.

Then I began to realize that there were other moments in my life that made me feel the same way. There were times when I felt at one with myself, my kids, my husband and family. Feeling those "at one" moments is what I live for. They are the moments and feelings that I cherish, and if I were to die today, I would die content knowing that I had experienced them. This is what living life is all about for me, and the measurement of my success.

Those moments didn't just happen for me. Truly, I didn't change just because I found someone who loved me. I used to believe that if someone would just love me, then everything would be all right, that *I* would be all right. But then I realized that I had to work at making my life change. When I began to take charge of my life, things began to change.

I learned that I needed to stop trying to be perfect and to please everybody. I had to stop focusing on myself and enjoy life and the people around me. Everything used to be all about me. *Me, me, me*. If you've ever tried to carry on a conversation with someone who talks about herself the whole time and doesn't let you get a word in, you know it is hard. Conversation is for two people. However, we can get so caught up in

the "What about *me*?" mentality that we can't see beyond ourselves. We neglect others as a result of trying only to have our needs met.

Life began to change for me when I put forth the effort to show genuine concern and unconditional love to people, including myself. Those at one moments were a gift that I believe was the result of taking the time to learn that love makes the world go around. When people feel valued and loved, they feel secure, happy, and content. They are confident and can grow and aspire to great things in life. Without love, we feel depressed, lonely, and dead inside.

After I realized the power of love, it became my goal to make sure that my children and husband knew and felt that I loved them unconditionally. I stopped trying to get love from others and began to express love, to give people the gift of feeling genuinely loved. When I began to show more concern and genuine love to others, I received the gift of feeling loved back. Most important, I felt at one with myself.

Positive Self-Esteem and Success

Success came to me when I applied new concepts and tools to my life. Critical thinking led me to radically alter my way of life. Along with developing critical thinking skills, I gained a deeper understanding of the power of love. When I finally decided that it was time to stop waiting for someone to love me, but instead to start loving myself and others, I found contentment. I decided that what matters most in life is that my children and husband know and feel the love I hold for them, so I stopped focusing on myself. I realized that by showing them love, I can help them grow, too. I can help them satisfy their needs for love, security, and self-acceptance. I can give them positive, happy moments to remember, instead of negative, disappointing ones. It took years, but once I realized the impact that love makes in someone's life, it no longer mattered what material possessions I owned, what kind of job I had, or how much money I possessed.

This realization was brought home again, living in Louisiana when the eye of Hurricane Katrina was directly over our house. We were among the evacuees that headed north to Mississippi and ended up going to Texas. I remember driving all night long, listening to the radio news about where the hurricane was and how catastrophic it was going to be. It was surreal, driving down the highway at three in the morning with the other evacuees, and not knowing if we would have a home or life to come back to when we returned, if we returned. During that drive, I realized that our personal belongings didn't matter; what mattered was that we had each other. I felt blessed. To me, that was success.

The only thing I can change is myself, but
sometimes that makes all the difference.
ANONYMOUS

Resources

Coping.org is a web site with much helpful information, ranging from how to handle guilt, building trust, tools for improving communication, stress management, and much more.

<www.coping.org>

Talentdevelop.com features what popular actors and actresses have to say about self-esteem and their struggles with it.

<www.talentdevelop.com/selfesteem.html>

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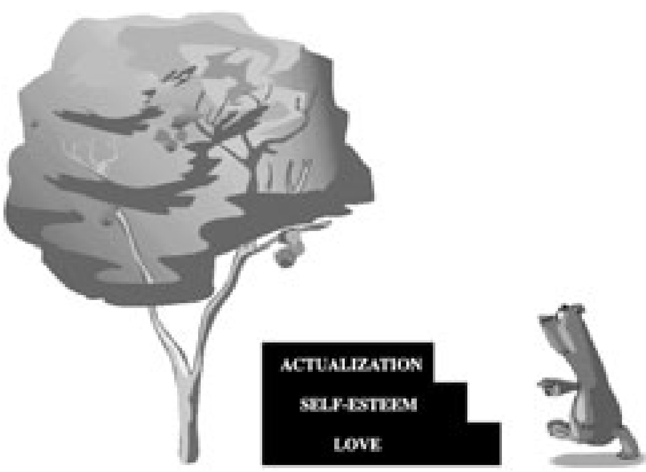
Step 4

Love And Where To Find It

Love takes up where knowledge leaves off.
SAINT THOMAS ACUINAS

Our Need for Love

Just as we need water, food, sleep, and sunlight, we humans also need love. We need to receive it, and we need to give it. I discovered that love improved my self-esteem, which propelled me to seek self-actualization. Without love and self-esteem, you cannot achieve self-actualization.



Much more than a pretty sentiment, the love I'm talking about is a foundation that provides emotional stability and allows us to develop positive self-esteem and the other qualities that make life rich and rewarding. The love I'm talking about confers upon us the freedom to be who we are as individuals in relationship with others.

While it is true that love exists within all of us and that we must find our own love in order to give it, we also need the love of other people if we are to thrive. Admitting that we have this need is not a sign of weakness, failure, or incompetence. Each one of us is wired for love, and when that need is satisfied, we enjoy feelings of competence, security, and well-being.

Lessons in Love

We learn about love and relationships growing up in our family unit. With proper nurturing by and bonding with our parents or caregivers, we develop a sense of inclusion—of belonging—within our family. As we mature, this basic feeling of belonging gives us a storehouse of strength and the ability to form stable and healthy relationships.

Studies show that children who receive parental guidance, support, and affection have fewer problems in adulthood. While there are exceptions, these people generally tend to be psychologically and physically healthier than those who did not receive adequate nurturing. The bottom line is that, when as children we are loved, supported, encouraged, praised, and shown affection, then as adults, we will feel included and enjoy a general sense of self-acceptance.

If we experienced neglect, shaming, criticism, rejection, and abandonment, however, and if we were harshly punished or abused as children, we will probably find it difficult to bond with and feel included by others. This sets up a pattern that makes us always feel estranged from others. Emotionally, we may suffer in family and work life. Our health may challenge us at different times, as well.

Lack of parental support during childhood can cause depression and chronic conditions such as hypertension, anxiety, and arthritis in adulthood. A person who experienced neglect, failed to bond with his or her parents, and experienced a deep sense of being excluded from others during childhood often associates that neglect with feelings of abandonment and rejection. Research suggests that the brain interprets and reacts to social exclusion as if it were physical pain. Even a minor disruption to a relationship can trigger the part of the brain that signals to the body that it has been injured.

Clearly, the need for social connection is rooted deeply in us—so much so that we perceive exclusion as a threat to survival. When we sense it, our bodies produce

feelings that trigger depression and self-criticism. We may turn all our negative thoughts in upon ourselves, which results in a spiral of ever-diminishing self-esteem.

No wonder we devote so much time and energy to finding and keeping relationships. Of course, some of us deny our need for relationship and live alone and aloof, but many of us will go to great lengths to find a significant other. When we do, we often suffer because during childhood we did not experience a healthy connection with our caregivers, so we don't know how to be intimate. We encounter a host of problems. We cling, chase after, obsess about, and generally barrage the object of our affection, be it friend or lover, with our neediness.

We may become overly dependent upon our partner to fulfill our need for love. We become disappointed very easily because no one can live up to the demands that we place on them. Consider the wife whose need for love was unmet in her youth. She now demands her husband's undivided attention, and when she doesn't get it she feels he doesn't love her. She then goes into a spiral of self-pity, self-criticism, and feelings of unworthiness. Her self-esteem takes a nosedive and the relationship suffers.

If we make someone else the sole source of our supply of love, we will live in fear all the time, setting ourselves up to be hurt and disappointed again and again. For instance, a woman in an abusive relationship may be unable to end it because she believes that it is her only source of love. She will be devastated and helpless without it; her self-esteem is so low that she believes no one could ever love her again.

Even when we find someone to love us, it doesn't guarantee that we will feel good about ourselves. We can still experience loneliness and depression. I had this experience in my first marriage. I thought when I got married, all my problems would be solved and I'd live the life of my dreams. I didn't know that a person could be lonely while married. If you have low self-esteem prior to a relationship, you will continue to struggle with low self-esteem within the relationship.

Relationships are tenuous at best when one or both partners have low self-esteem. If you're fortunate, your partner will have the patience and wisdom to deal with your insecurities. If you are aware of your struggle, you won't push your partner totally away when you can't get them to love you the way you want them to.

It is sad but true that adults who grew up in loveless or abusive homes often find themselves unable to give themselves to their partner because they're so focused on receiving love for themselves. We bring our history of exclusion and rejection into the relationship and make it our partner's responsibility to make us feel okay. We expect our partners to give us what only we can give ourselves. And often our partner lets us down.

How We Cope

One of the reasons it is so difficult to find oneself—to have the strength to spend time alone getting to know oneself—is our culture's obsession with romantic love. Spurred on by movies and television shows that depict the glories and dramas of romantic love, many of us search intensely, endlessly—frustratingly—for the one relationship that will make us feel truly loved and accepted. In 2005, one popular video store carried over 300 romance movies, and the online Internet store Amazon.com listed 90,361 romance books, 11,994 CDs, and 32,000 songs with the word *love* in the title.

We are a culture besotted by romantic love. Some of us feel we have failed in life if we don't find romantic love. Consequently, we will marry anyone at all, for all the wrong reasons, and then stay in the relationship because we are afraid of being alone, of more rejection from society, of being failures at love.

Let's Look at the Facts

There are two primary types of faulty reasoning related to growing up with an unmet need for love. The first convinces you that something or somebody else can make up for the love you didn't get earlier in life. The bad news is: Nobody can give you what you didn't get, not even your partner. So if no one is ever going to love you unconditionally the way you wanted your parents to love you, no one else can ever completely satisfy your need for unconditional love. When we indulge in this faulty thinking, we can get sidetracked and go down the road of trying to find someone to meet our need for love. Then if we do find someone, we're not satisfied in the relationship.

The good news is that your unmet need for love can be met. By whom, you may ask?

By you.

Many people, including myself, have begun this process by learning about and understanding the person looking back at them in the mirror. We can't love and accept ourselves if we don't know who we are, what our prominent needs are, and what makes us laugh, cry, and get angry. Once I began to really know myself, I began to love myself and realize that I am worthwhile and valuable no matter what anybody thinks or feels about me. I'm here to tell you that you can love yourself and live a happy life, no matter what your background.

The second type of faulty thinking tricks you into feeling that you don't belong. We incorrectly base our self-esteem, or lack of it, on whether or not others loved us as we needed them to, and whether or not we felt accepted by them. Before I discovered

critical thinking, I believed that my life was worthless. I had formed the faulty conclusion that the world—the entire cosmos—didn't accept me, which made me feel like I was diagonally parked in a parallel universe.

Critical Thinking

When you apply critical thinking to your plight, if you are in a situation like mine, you can see, first of all, that rejecting yourself because you have an unmet need for love is not rational. You may never get the love you want from another person, you may never have the parental support you desire, and you may lack someone special in your life to love and love you back. But ask yourself: Are these facts the correct reference point to base my self-esteem upon? Do these things determine my inherent worth as a human being?

If the answer is no, then please read on.

Critical thinking shows us that experiences don't define us. Your self-esteem is not based on whether or not somebody loves or loved you. Nor does it have anything to do with what you own or how much money you make. The secret to positive self-esteem is to know who you are and to believe both that you belong in the world and that you have a purpose. All of us do. Perhaps it is our life's work to find out exactly what that is, but it does exist.

Walking Through Fear

In order to tap into the self-esteem that is yours by birthright, you must walk through a host of fears that have been with you for a long time. If you are or have been dependent upon other people to meet your need for love, as I was, then chances are you experience a great deal of fear, much of which is illogical and immobilizing.

Some Common Fears

- Fear of not being good enough—If I don't measure up to certain standards, I have failed.
- Fear of not succeeding in love—If I don't have someone in my life, I'm a failure; therefore, I can't love myself.
- Fear of failure—I can't take any more rejection. If I fail, people will not like me.
- Fear of conflict—Conflict will make me feel unloved and unaccepted.
- Fear of being vulnerable.
- Fear of being shamed.
- Fear of being hurt.
- Fear of being humiliated.
- Fear of being inferior.
- Fear of being left or of being alone—If I'm not a good housewife or not

good-looking enough, my husband will leave me. I'm afraid of being alone.

- Fear of not being loved—If I'm not loved by someone, I'm a failure.
- Fear of being anxious, frightened, or embarrassed.
- Fear of guilt—If I feel guilty, I can't accept myself.
- Fear of being judged negatively by others.
- Fear of intimacy—If I allow someone to become intimate with me, the other person may reject me.
- Fear of taking risks—I might lose someone. I have to hold on to them.
- Fear of being seen as insignificant—I don't count in the relationship.
- Fear of rejection—If people don't agree with me, they don't like me.

Unreasonable fear in any form causes negative behaviors that lead to undesirable outcomes in all areas of life. Unreasonable fears impede our ability to have relationships of depth and meaning. These fears prevent us from self-actualizing. Once we learn to recognize how our fears affect our lives, we can then challenge and control them instead of allowing them to dominate us.

Knowing how they sabotage our happiness can help us to overcome them.

Some negative outcomes from irrational fears are listed below.

Fears influence our behavior and decision-making.

Feeling fearful diminishes our motivation to pursue our dreams and goals. For example, a fear of rejection may make one a perfectionist; unable to handle stress at work and home; susceptible to burnout; unable to have fun; distrustful of others; unable to forgive; and suffering from overwhelming guilt if unsuccessful.

Irrational fears cause us to view situations unrealistically, not as they really are.

We either act on false information or we become immobilized and unable to make decisions.

Irrational fears affect how we communicate with others.

For example, the fear of rejection can influence our communication style, which can spiral into other negative actions. We might become too careful of what we say in front of others for fear of being judged negatively. As a result, we become less assertive and withdraw from social interactions. This withdrawal could progress into a decreasing level of self-confidence, which feeds fears of other things like conflict or confrontation. In other words, one fear can escalate into many fears, additional negative behavior patterns, and even, eventually, into depression.

Fears affect our personal relationships and limit our ability to overcome barriers in our relationships.

We want meaningful relationships, but often fail to recognize how past experiences have provoked fears that we bring with us into current relationships. We unknowingly act upon these fears. For instance, if you had a partner who was unfaithful, you may have a heightened fear that future partners will also betray you. If you felt rejected by your primary caregivers as a child, you will subconsciously expect partners to reject you in the same way.

Fears may increase control issues.

Fear makes us want to push away anything that threatens us and cling to what we believe we must have. In other words, fear makes us control freaks. A married person whose need for love was unmet may fear his spouse will leave him. As a defense mechanism, he may try to control his wife with intimidation, and he may manipulate her. The controlling husband may attack with false statements: “You can’t do anything right,” or “You are dumb and incompetent.” He believes that this puts him in control and places him on a higher level than his wife. His tactics are self-defeating, however; he pushes his wife away.

Fears can make us unable to resolve anger issues.

Fear of rejection may make us unwilling to forgive someone who has betrayed us. Instead of forgiving, our anger builds up and causes us to make negative and perhaps false assumptions. Whenever thoughts associated with the betrayal arise, they stir up hostility, sarcasm, cynicism, withdrawal, or other defensive behaviors.

Fears prevent resolution of loss and grief.

The fear of recognizing or identifying losses experienced in life can provoke feelings of guilt, shame, anger, hurt, frustration, or rejection. To protect ourselves from feeling those potentially overwhelming emotions, we may find ways to avoid dealing with the loss by suppressing our feelings and thoughts about it. For as long as we do this, we suffer from the unresolved hurt.

Fear creates negative communication patterns.

We may fear confrontation with others because we want to avoid uncomfortable conversations and situations that may lead to rejection. When we have this fear, we don’t listen to others; we hear only what we want to hear. We interpret the speaker’s words according to what we want to hear, which is not necessarily how it is intended. This is faulty thinking, and prevents us from engaging in relationships of all kinds.

Fear is a survival mechanism.

When we fear something, our senses become heightened, and we make decisions quickly, in self-defense. We can use fear effectively whenever we feel threatened or know that losing control could cause us harm. When our fear is based on faulty

assumptions, however, we are likely to develop irrational behaviors.

When we recognize our fears and how they influence our behavior, we can use critical thinking to help us let them go. If we continue to let fear run us, we will keep running from our problems.

- TRY THIS! -

1. Do any of my problems revolve around a fear?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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2. Are my fears related to my need for love?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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3. Can I recognize any negative outcomes or behaviors because my need for love is unmet?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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4. Do I act in self-defense when I don't get my needs met?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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Now think of a situation when you acted in self-defense. Explain your behavior and thoughts.

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The next time you realize you are acting emotionally, stop and try to determine how you might be acting in self-defense, and whether this strategy is effective in meeting your needs.

The Opposite of Fear

The opposite of fear is love. And so we return to the one thing we most desire, which is also, ironically, the thing that many of us most fear. Many of us go to great lengths to push love away. Some of us even deny that we need it. We turn to food or money or alcohol or drugs or work or television to numb our feelings, to control the need. The astonishing thing is that love is beyond anyone's control. We don't decide who we love and we can't make others love us. We can't even make ourselves stop loving someone. Love is absolutely free: it either happens or it doesn't.

Since it's so hard for most of us to come to grips with this force we call love, it's no wonder that we get fooled by imitations, things that are "sort of" like love.

> *"If only I could have more money or status, people would admire me."* That's sort of like love, because if you can achieve this, you can feel temporary satisfaction.
>
> *"If I am attractive and desirable and have an active sex life, people will love me and I will know I am loved."* That's sort of like love, but again it only temporarily satisfies the real need for love.

"If I wear expensive clothes, drive a great car, and live at the right address; if I weigh the perfect weight, I will be loveable." That's sort of like love, but not really. The real need to satisfy the love our hearts long for doesn't go away when we get these things.

"If I give myself all the things I crave, rich foods, plenty of alcohol and drugs, I am loving myself." That's sort of like love, but in the end it just makes you sick.

"If I tell someone I love her, I may actually come to feel it." That's sort of like love, but it is a lie. *(Copyright 1999-2003. Burbeck, C. www.runningempty.org)*

These strategies only distract us and are only temporarily satisfying; ultimately, they fail. As long as we accept imitations or use the wrong methods to gain love, we will never find the real thing.

What Is Love?

Love is the most powerful force in the universe, but having said that, I can't tell you exactly what it is. Love defies description. You know it when you feel it–it is the true essence of who you are. Even if you believe you don't know what love is-and depression has a way of convincing people they don't–you really do know. If you have a pet that means the world to you, you know love. That feeling in your heart when your pet looks at you in a certain way is pure, unadulterated love.

Love is a feeling, but it's not simply a feeling. It's a state of mind, but it's more than that, too. We experience it in its purity and simplicity more often than we realize.

The way we think about love often has nothing to do with what love really is. We allow our early relationships to define love for us. If we felt deprived of love and our needs weren't met, we may think of love as an impossible dream, or we may become cynical about it and be so involved with what we imagine we are missing that we ignore the moments when our hearts are full of love.

Most of us formulate our ideas of love from popular culture, from the images and scenarios of romantic love. These images are so seductive that we fall for the lie that romantic love will cure all our ills, that it is the only love which really matters. Our society's marketing of romance fosters faulty thinking at every turn.

Yet, to know love is to understand the difference between real love and fantasy. Critical thinking challenges us to acknowledge the differences between authentic love and illusion. We must evaluate and challenge our assumptions. Many of these assumptions may be tied to negative self-esteem and connected to a perceived lack of the kind of love we think we need. Other assumptions are related to fears that developed out of our unmet need for love.

- TRY THIS! -

Write your own definition of love.

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Definition of Love

Love is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, love between human beings is strong affection or emotion for another person. We receive something from them, and we give the other person a high level of value, respect, and honor. When we love someone, we want to see them happy. The love in our heart and in their heart moves us and flows between us.

As a verb, *love* means to show affection to another person. When a person loves us, we are the object of his or her affection. It is an unselfish act that shows concern for another's well-being and growth.

People often develop wrong ideas about what love is. Parents may shower a child with gifts rather than affection. This leads the child to form the belief that money and things equal love. As an adult, this child may find it difficult to experience intimate relationships.

Love produces a feeling of connection to another, a feeling of unconditional acceptance. Love wants the best for another and allows them space to grow. In order to be able to give and receive that kind of love, we need to be confident and stable within ourselves. Otherwise, we risk losing the relationship through neediness or negative thinking, and behavior such as jealousy and mistrust.

- TRY THIS! -

List some of the influences or situations that helped you define your meaning of love.

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On what do you anchor or base your meaning of love? Think of an anchor as your original experience of love and being loved. Do you think love equals material things, or is it something else for you?

How do you frame the meaning of love? In other words, how does your original experience of love impact your ideas and experience of love now? List any faulty inferences and assumptions you have made about the meaning of love.

Ask yourself the following questions, and pick the answer that fits right now. If you have further thoughts about this, write them down.

a. Do I feel sad because I think nobody loves me?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Why?

b. Do I feel that if someone would love me, my life would be better and I could like myself?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Why?

c. Does part of my depression stem from an unmet need for love (either from my primary source or from needing someone special in my life)?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Which needs?

d. Am I trying to get this need for a primary source of love met through other people?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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e. Am I relying too heavily on others to meet my need for love, without loving myself first?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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f. Do I criticize or feel badly about myself for not having this need met?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How?

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g. If I don't get this need met, does it justify rejecting myself and criticizing who I am?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Why?

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h. Am I afraid of not meeting this need?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Why?

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i. What conclusions have I formed about myself relative to this unmet need?

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j. If I don't get my underlying need met, does it define me as a certain type of person?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Why or why not?

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Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

RUMI

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9

Step 5

Ferreting Out Faulty Thinking

One's first step in wisdom is to question everything;
and one's last is to come to terms with everything.
GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG

There are as many ways to look at a situation as there are people observing it. When someone doesn't possess logical thinking skills, however, you can be sure they'll see any situation in a skewed manner, with emphasis on the negative. This is tunnel vision, a way of seeing that generates diminishing returns. With tunnel vision, which is part of the package of depression, we view situations as all-or-nothing, black or white, from one single bleak perspective. It is useful to look closely at two types of faulty thinking that sabotage our happiness and contribute to depression.

Inferences and Assumptions

An *inference* is moving from what information you do know to a conclusion that is assumed to be accurate. For example, your boss tells you she wants a report from you on Friday. You infer that she means any time on Friday and conclude that giving it to her at the end of the day on Friday is what she wants.

An *assumption* is the act of taking for granted information that is untested. In the example above, you assume that turning the report into your boss at the end of the day on Friday will be fine. However, you find out Friday morning that she wants it at the beginning of the work day, not at the end.

Every day we make assumptions and act on them. Assumptions, in other words, are natural and necessary. They enable us to make decisions by setting limits and providing a framework. Assumptions guide scientific methods and enable discoveries, inventions, and creative problem-solving. We can choose to learn from our assumptions-or not.

Not all inferences and assumptions lead to positive outcomes. When an inference is based on incomplete or bad information or on a falsehood, any conclusion or decision that is made from that inference can be faulty. When our assumptions remain in our subconscious and are unexamined, they may be derived less from facts or laws and more from our own perception-or misperception-of the situation.

Our inferences and assumptions are hidden until we become aware of them, in much the same way as our emotions and needs are hidden until we make a conscious effort to identify them. Until we make an effort to identify the inferences and assumptions, we will be unable to recognize them and decide whether or not to accept them. By thinking critically, we can examine any faulty thinking for validity and truth.

First, identify your thought, feeling, or belief as in Step One (Chapter 5).

Second, discover what past event is causing you to experience negative thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. In other words, upon what event is the thought based? It is important to identify the event and how it makes you feel, because the conclusions you formed about that event influence how you feel, think, and behave in the future. You remember how you perceived the event at the time, sometimes subconsciously, and that keeps you reliving it and reacting to it with irrational behavior, either out of fear or a perceived threat to your needs. The behavior that stems from fear or threat can become automatic. Once you act in a particular way, each time you are reminded of the event, you'll continue to react negatively in similar ways and situations.
Reflecting back over the event may be painful, so I suggest that while doing this exercise you have someone nearby to talk to. Find somebody you trust and who is looking out for your best interests.

Third, identify the relevant need using Maslow's Hierarchy, as you did in Step Two (Chapter 6). Fourth, assess whether the thought, feeling, or belief is truthful. Search for reliability, validity, and flawed thinking in the process used to observe and reason about your thought.

To determine the validity of a thought, you must apply critical thinking to the reasoning process you used when you came to conclusions about the events in your life.

To do this, reflect back to the event and determine

What was the inference I made?

What was my assumption?

Challenge your inferences and assumptions, and find the facts. Begin by asking yourself questions.

- What information did I use to form my inference, and was that information accurate?
- Did I form a faulty conclusion based on the inference and decide to assume it was an accurate conclusion?
- Was there missing information?
- What are the facts?
- Did I overlook something and jump to a conclusion?
- What need in Maslow's Hierarchy was this event related to?
- What information is missing?
- Was my reference point or perception biased?
- Was my reference point or perception based on limited observation?
- Did I let my feelings take control without using good reasoning skills?
- Did I use the correct reference point on which to base my conclusion?

By applying critical thinking to our problems, we give ourselves the chance to correct faulty thinking and stop assuming that what we've held on to for so long is the truth. We can change and update the mental folder that holds the negative thoughts that cause us so much pain. Once we correct the faulty thoughts and beliefs, we can feel and think more positively about the past, present, and future.

Reflection

Reflection is key to critical thinking. It is a process of stepping back with a detached view of yourself, your thoughts and feelings, and your problem or situation. Once you know the thoughts and assumptions you hold, you can determine whether they are valid or faulty by analyzing them in the ways we have discussed. With this method you uncover new information, which gives you a clearer, more realistic picture of every situation you analyze. Let's go over the steps so far, using an illustration.

Angela's Story

Angela is 36, feels depressed, and doesn't particularly like herself. She knows that she is angry at her parents, but doesn't fully understand why she hurts the way she does. Angela remembers that her dad wasn't around much, and they don't talk much to this day. What she didn't know before was that her dad had to work two jobs just to make ends meet. He only has a high school education, so he had to take any job he could get, working during the day at a local gas station and at night as a janitor at the high school across town. This meant that Angela's dad didn't get to spend much time with her, or make it to her high school basketball games. When Angela would ask her

dad to come to a school activity, she always got the same reply: “I have to work, Angela,” or “Not tonight, I’m too tired.” This caused Angela to feel that her dad didn’t care about her, and because there was no relationship, Angela felt rejected by him.

The steps Angela needs to take are as follows:

1. Identify her thoughts, feelings, or beliefs.
2. Identify the particular event.
3. Identify her need associated with the event.
4. Assess her thoughts, feelings, or beliefs associated with the event.

Angela applies critical thinking to her problem by first identifying her feelings. She discovers that she feels frustrated and angry. Angela then identifies the events that caused her to feel this way. She realizes that she has come to the conclusion that her relationship with her parents makes her feel hurt and emotionally wounded. She feels she should have had a deeper relationship with her parents, and that her father failed to give her the love and support she wanted. Her need for love is the root cause of her feelings and thoughts.

Now Angela can use the information she has about her feelings to assess her thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, determining the reasoning behind them and applying critical thinking. This process will lead her to discover a new, clearer way to see her situation.

Those events of her childhood, along with other people’s behavior, led Angela to form faulty inferences and assumptions about what was going on in her family, and why. Let’s consider her inferences and assumptions.

Inference and Faulty Assumption #1

Angela inferred that because her dad didn’t make it to her basketball games, it meant that he didn’t care about her. She assumed this to be the truth, and since her dad didn’t care, then there must be something wrong with her.

Inference and Faulty Assumption #2

Angela inferred that because she and her father didn’t speak much, it meant he didn’t love her. She assumed this to be the truth, and because her dad didn’t love her, then nobody ever will love her.

Now that Angela knows how to use critical thinking skills, she can assess her thoughts by taking into consideration the missing information and faulty thinking that created the stress that led to her depression. She begins this process by asking some of the questions mentioned above, which will allow her to step back from her feelings and reactions to determine her reasoning process.

Finding the Missing Facts

Angela's initial view of the situation is biased toward her own experience, so she perceives it in the only way that makes sense to her. But the story will take different forms, depending on whether Angela, her dad, or her mother is telling it. According to Angela, her father didn't care about her. This is the information on which her thoughts are based. However, there were some facts that Angela didn't recognize, and as a result she fell victim to faulty thinking. Finding the missing information and learning new facts is important if you want to clarify the situation and move forward with your life, no longer limited by the event and the depression it is causing. Now Angela needs to ask herself: "What facts am I missing?"

During Angela's reasoning, she forgot to consider certain factual information that was overlooked. She let her emotions take control and do the thinking for her, taking it for granted that she knew the truth. By looking for faulty thinking, she'll uncover and discover where her reasoning went wrong. Let's take into account some facts about Angela's situation.

Fact one: Her dad's educational level limited the type of work he could get, so he had to work two different jobs to support the family.

Fact two: Her dad's second job required him to drive 45 minutes each way in traffic across town.

Fact three: Angela's father averaged a 60-hour work week, not including travel time. The long work days account for his lack of energy when he wasn't working, and limited the time and energy he had to spend with Angela.

Fact four: Angela's mother was also seeking to meet her need to feel loved. Because of this unmet need, she lacked positive self-esteem and was depressed.

It can also be helpful to identify assumptions related to the environment. To do this, think about the people involved and how you felt about what they did. As Angela reflects on her situation, she can recognize that her dad may have been the quiet type who didn't like, or didn't know how, to discuss feelings. Her dad's highest values may have been on his time and his ability to support his family. Perhaps his personality led him to deal with facts rather than feelings and to solve problems rationally. Maybe her father felt he had no control over his own life, or perhaps he was just unable to understand other people's feelings.

Angela's mom was always preoccupied and wasn't involved in her daughter's life, either. She herself didn't feel loved by Angela's father; she was always bothered and consumed with trying to get her husband to show love. They would occasionally fight and yell in front of Angela, who sometimes left the house so she wouldn't have to hear

them yelling. So Angela's mother wasn't there for her emotionally, either. Her mother also had a need for love and had suffered from depression as an adult, but she tried not to let Angela see her true feelings. Angela didn't realize this at the time. Through her teenage eyes, Angela saw her mother as unloving and uncaring because she didn't spend much time with her daughter or get involved in Angela's life.

Angela's mother may not have been consciously aware of her own needs and low self-esteem, and the result was that she couldn't effectively communicate her love for Angela. She wanted to but couldn't, because she didn't know how to love herself. She was stuck on the third step of Maslow's Hierarchy, the need to feel loved. Angela can now look at her mother as someone who herself needed love and acceptance at that time. Now she realizes that her mother's inability to show love to her was because she was consumed with meeting this need for herself.

Since there is faulty reasoning in Angela's situation, there is a strong possibility that her thoughts and beliefs were also wrong. Angela can now reconsider her old thoughts and use facts to determine a more accurate reference point from which to form a new conclusion.

Analyzing Emotions and Thoughts

- TRY THIS! -

Step One: Reflect on and identify the dominant feeling or thought that you have most of the time, or a feeling or thought that is bothering you, one you wish you could stop feeling or thinking.

Could what I've been believing and thinking be faulty?

❑ Yes ❑ No

How did I initially interpret the situation?

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What are the reasons for the feelings? Could they be leading me astray? What are my feelings trying to tell me?

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Step Two: Identify the event. What was the event that gave rise to my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs?

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Step Three: Identify my unmet needs associated with the event. Look back to Maslow's Hierarchy if necessary.

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Am I trying to get an unmet need fulfilled?

❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, are my unmet needs solely contingent on someone or something outside myself, and why?

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Step Four: Identify faulty thinking and analyze it for validity and truth. What was my inference?

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What was my assumption?

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Begin using critical thinking to challenge your inferences and assumptions by identifying any facts and barriers to critical thinking, as listed in Chapter 3, and any barriers to decision-making, as shown in Chapter 4.

What information did I use to form my inference? Was that information correct? Did I form a faulty conclusion based on a faulty inference, and decide to assume it was the truth?

To address this question, it may help to ask yourself the following questions: Which of these played a role in my reasoning and the formation of my inferences and assumptions?

- ❑ Vague images and information
- ❑ Hidden assumptions (information assumed to be true)
- ❑ Faulty feelings
- ❑ Similar experiences
- ❑ Lack of facts
- ❑ Faulty opinions
- ❑ Outside influences
- ❑ Fallacies
- ❑ Faulty reasoning, as described in Chapter 3
- ❑ Missing information
- ❑ Emotional thinking
- ❑ Inaccurate information
- ❑ Lack of information
- ❑ Oversimplification
- ❑ Other

How could my need (from Maslow's Hierarchy) have played a role in my faulty thinking?

Consider the other people involved in the situation — what new information and facts can I find that pertain to the people involved? What might they have been going through at the time?

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How can I understand the situation from their perspective? What might have been their story? What unmet need was I trying to get met through this person(s)?

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Were the people involved capable of giving me what I wanted or satisfying my needs at that time?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Why or why not?

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What might have been their feelings, emotions, and unmet needs?

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Are those people able to understand their own feelings and the underlying, driving force behind their unmet needs?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Is basing my self-worth on this past event due to faulty, emotional thinking?

❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, how?

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How could I have mistaken this event for a factor on which to base my self-esteem?

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If I were in the same situation today, how would I view it? Would I come up with the same conclusion?

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The answer to that last question will most likely be no. Using your critical thinking skills, you would look at your inferences regarding the situation and check whether there were any faulty assumptions involved.

Looking again at Angela's story, it is likely that her parents were not aware of their own actions and the pain they caused her. People can only love others according to how they have experienced love themselves. Those who have never experienced a healthy, nurturing love are limited in their ability to express this kind of love to others. For this reason, we can't blame others when they can't give us love in a way that they have not experienced themselves.

People who do not recognize their unmet need to be loved unconditionally also cannot recognize, understand, or meet the needs of those closest to them, such as their children. The result is that a child's most basic need to be loved is often unmet, and this becomes a pattern that is passed down through generations. Until that pattern or cycle is broken, people will continue to put their children at risk of developing low self-esteem and experiencing depression. People who don't experience healthy, unconditional love as children are also unlikely to be able to love their spouses as they want to be loved.

It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning.
CLAUDE BERNARD

10

Step 6

The Truth Sets You Free

Let us accept the truth, even when it surprises us and alters our views.
GEORGE SAND

If you'll recall, psychologist Jean Piaget proposed that the brain automatically creates mental folders in which it stores observed information. Once we begin to uncover the truth of a situation and our faulty assumptions about it, our mental folders automatically update. This enables us to change our behavior, to respond differently, and to feel better.

Untruth keeps us bound to negative thinking and depression. These negativities dissolve and lose control, however, when we apply critical thinking and draw correct conclusions. We gain the power to determine how we will interpret and respond to new situations, as well as old ones.

This process can be challenging, there's no doubt about it. The debilitating emotions-fear, anger, shame, and guilt, among others-that have us in their grip will lose their intensity. Be aware, however, that when the light of your conscious attention shines on them for the first time, they may rear up ferociously and seem overwhelming. This is similar to the reaction of your body when you pierce a boil, for example. It is painful, yes, but it is also beneficial. So don't worry if your feelings seem to get worse during this process. It is all for the good. I found it helpful to have one friend who I could talk to during especially challenging times. This friend helped me feel supported and accepted. If you do talk with someone, make sure that the person will keep your confidence and that you feel comfortable talking with him or her. I encourage you to find someone you trust because sharing your feelings can feel scary.

Seeing the Glass Half Full

We spend so much time thinking about the negative things in our life that we get in the habit of seeing only the bad and the ugly. Our power drains from us when we forget to look for the good in things. It is impossible to feel good and powerful and effective when your vision is clouded by negativity.

I learned that I had to challenge myself to identify at least one positive outcome from the events in my daily life, and to do the same for future endeavors. The more I did this, the easier it became, and the less I focused on the negative. Now, instead of seeing bad all around me, I use critical thinking skills to make sure I'm drawing correct conclusions. If I see a negative, I challenge it.

This is a hard-earned skill. It takes real practice and determination. Not only does our culture emphasize the negative–just watch the news for five minutes–but we are accustomed to letting something or someone else do our thinking and decision-making for us. Advertisements tell us what to buy, what to eat, what to wear, what diet to follow, and how we should look and act. We are brainwashed into adapting to new technologies such as the Internet (not so new now, but you see the point) and buying the latest gadget. Computer programs do our work for us. Computers type for us, calculate for us, and check our spelling for us; automobiles now tell us when we have a flat tire before the tire goes flat; and handheld Global Positioning systems tell us where to drive. All of these advances are wonderful, make our lives more exciting, and save time. Yet, even with all these great advances, we must be sure to think for ourselves. If we don't, we become reliant on the things and people around us, and less capable of making our own decisions. If we don't learn to apply critical thinking to our lives, we lose our freedom.

Observe That Thought and Feeling

If you have been depressed, you know that when you allow your mind to roam back over past, painful situations, you feel even worse. I did. When I reflected back, my feelings deteriorated from sad to very depressed. When depressed, we may feel different emotions-some people feel anger and hurt, some feel sadness and hurt. Whatever you feel, once you begin to use critical thinking skills, you gain control of your life instead of letting your emotions take control or letting others think for you.

You can apply the skill of identifying faulty thinking by means of critical thinking to every situation and emotion in your life, especially the ones that seem to be controlling you. Usually there is more than one situation that troubles you and contributes to depression-and one depressing thought about a problematic issue can mutate into a host of dark feelings and thoughts that swirl endlessly and overwhelmingly within.

When I began the process described in this book, I realized I had to apply critical thinking to more than one problem. Several events from my past, not just one, depressed me and kept me feeling overwhelmed and out of control. Yet, I was able to overcome most of my depression as soon as I began to see and discover the truth. When I was suffering, I didn't even realize I had low self-esteem, but then I learned how much it was connected to my depression. With a positive view about myself, I began to feel unstoppable, unbeatable, and fulfilled. I began to see the positive side of most situations, past and present. Even if I didn't initially see a situation as positive, I knew how to start the process of evaluating and reasoning in a way that uplifted me rather than depressed me. I have now learned the critical thinking process by heart. It is now automatic for me. However, even though some of my problems were interconnected, I did have to address each one separately.

Going back to Angela's situation, she would continue reflecting and analyzing the situation for truth by stepping back to compare her assumptions with the missing information and facts. In the process, she will no doubt see the reality of the situation in a clearer light.

Discovering a New Freedom

- TRY THIS! -

Use the following worksheet to compare your old beliefs with the new facts you have discovered. Begin by stating the problem you've been working on. In section a), write down your old assumptions and thoughts (from the previous chapter). Identify the reference points (main information) you used to make the old assumptions, and list them in section b). In section c), list the correct, new information that you have discovered during your reflections. In section d), list the new reference point (facts) you will now base your decision on. Finally, use section e) to compare the old information to the new, more accurate information and reference point, and arrive at a final, more accurate conclusion.

Problem:

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a. Old beliefs, thoughts, or assumptions:

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b. Old Reference Point. What you based your thoughts and feelings on?

c. New Information/Facts:

d. New Reference Point:

New Accurate Conclusion:

1. Based on the conclusions you listed above, how will you anchor and view the situation in the future?

2. After reanchoring the situation (that is, finding a new point of reference), list your new thoughts, feelings, and beliefs related to the event and yourself.

3. What good results have come about as a result of the situation? (Examples: I learned a lesson in life; I learned something about myself; I learned that appearances can deceive; it wasn't as bad as I thought.)

4. Did I tie the event's conclusion to my self-esteem?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Explain how you could have mistaken the situation as a measure upon which to base self-worth and self-acceptance.

5. Why is measuring self-worth based on a past event faulty and emotional thinking?

6. Was I relying on someone else to love and accept me, or to meet my needs?

❑ Yes ❑ No

7. If someone doesn't love me, does that define me as a person? Why or why not?

8. How unreliable were my thoughts? How could they have been wrong?

9. How did faulty thinking lead to depression?

10. Describe how you now see yourself, after this process.

- TRY THIS! -

Make the decision to love yourself regardless of your situation or past events. Write your declaration of love for yourself:

As you learn to rely on yourself rather than others for your self-worth, you will begin to accept and love yourself unconditionally. When you are capable of discovering and viewing events in a more accurate way, using the tools that you've just learned, your confidence and self-esteem will keep growing. New truths will be revealed as you continue to think about events in a way that doesn't reflect negatively on you.

Once you love yourself and have positive self-esteem, you are ready to move to the next level: self-actualization.

Truth is like gold, it is to be obtained not by its growth, but by washing away from it all that is not gold.
LEO NIKOLAEVICH TOLSTOY

11

Step 7

Self-Discovery: A New Vision Of You

Know thyself.
SOCRATES

If you ask most people, "Who are you?" chances are their answer will be some thing like, "I'm a mother," "I'm an executive," "I'm a salesperson." Even people with positive self-esteem may answer the question like that because as we form our self-esteem, we choose to decide what to base it on. If we don't know what to base our self-esteem on, we'll keep searching until we find something that seems like a valid anchor, even if the information is incorrect, such as what appears to be our main role in life. When we don't know how to form our identity, we usually base it on what we do know. If we have enough bad experiences, it is easy to decide to base our self-worth on those painful experiences.

With this step, you will learn to see yourself as you really are. By now, you are likely to be feeling much better about yourself as you shine the light of self-discovery on your experience of yourself.

How Do You Know Who You Are?

Two big influences on self-esteem are our past experience and society. If we are not careful, both can mislead us. Our society, for instance, teaches people to respond to others. We learn to respond to men and women differently. Boys grow up getting recognition for their achievements, receiving praise for doing well in sports and growing up with a sense of self based on how well they master tasks. Girls are recognized for being nice, looking pretty, and creating and maintaining relationships. Girls develop a sense of self based on how well others notice these traits and features. Yet, what our society teaches us is acceptable is not always what is right. If we don't observe society's expectations critically, we are easily led by them. We can easily allow our self-esteem to be influenced by what society tells us.

We hold on to beliefs about ourselves. When painful past experiences form the basis of our self-esteem, we blind ourselves to knowing who we really are, as we remain self-absorbed in our emotions and the past. We allow our painful experiences and society to define who we are, and we accept at face value the inferences we've made about ourselves. The conclusions we draw prohibit us from changing our view about ourselves, because we believe the information is true. But we live in a false reality. As we continue to believe in a false reality that is based on faulty information, our emotions build up and intensify, until we are finally able to challenge them.

When our beliefs about ourselves are negative, we must reevaluate how we reasoned and formed those assumptions. Once we get to know ourselves, who we really are inside our human bodies, we have the ability to change our outmoded beliefs about ourselves and to see clearly into our own hearts. When we become more of who we are, we drop the false idea that anyone else is responsible for making us feel good about ourselves. We stop being dependent on others or material objects for our identity.

It is easy to refer back to childhood beliefs about ourselves in seeking to define who we are. For many of us, our youth is the default setting for our esteem and identity. But we change over time and develop new abilities, new tastes. It takes years for our personalities to develop, yet we have a tendency to carry forward the images we framed during our childhood experiences. In this chapter you will take a journey to learn about who you really are, so you can stop the negative self-talk. It's a journey of self-discovery that will help you determine facts about yourself and begin to let go of negative views that have come from past painful experiences.

Look Into Your Heart

The process of learning about yourself involves looking inward, which enables you to discover who you are. Self-discovery isn't about determining what your favorite food is or your favorite type of movie and music, although those may be interesting facts. The journey of self-discovery takes you on a more in-depth, thorough search of your thoughts, feelings, and actions. It is a process that illumines motivations, passions, values, what you love, and what you abhor, a journey that lasts a lifetime. As you continue this journey, you become more comfortable in your own skin. You become intimate with the most important person of all: *you.*

Self-Knowledge Is the Foundation

When you become self-aware, you can hear your thoughts, feel your feelings, and understand your actions. Once you are aware of yourself to this degree, you can begin to challenge negative thoughts and painful feelings because you can identify their root

causes, the need that is calling out to you. You can shift your thinking, rather than reacting to your feelings. This gives you more control over your life, and the ability to change your thoughts and behaviors if you want to.

As I began to use critical thinking and to understand myself better, I found it easier to control my reactions to things that scared me, for example. I remember a time when I was going to call a potential employer about a job interview. But I was terrified-my low self-esteem kicked in and I never called. However, I was *aware* that I ran because of my fear of being rejected. Gradually, I applied critical thinking to overcome this and other fears. You, too, can do this.

Self-knowledge is the foundation on which to build positive self-esteem. If you feel good about yourself, no sudden change, which can contribute to depression, will devastate you. If a person with healthy self-esteem loses his job, he has the self-confidence to look for another job. He knows that losing his job doesn't have anything to do with his self-worth, with who he is inside. He doesn't feel badly about himself or condemn himself. He perceives the incident as a minor setback. In his mind, the two issues–his self-worth and the job–are completely separate. His self-worth is not based on whether or not he has a job.

On the other hand, if someone with low self-esteem loses his job, he will view it as a catastrophe. If he has a family, he might blame himself for being a poor provider. He will equate the job loss with his worth as a human being. He might feel he is a failure.

Many people do not know that they can literally *find themselves*. They are cut off from their ability to question the source of their thoughts and actions. By choosing to forego learning about yourself, you risk staying stuck in depression. But if you choose to know yourself-as you obviously have or you wouldn't be at this point in the book-you will experience many rewarding benefits.

The Benefits of Self-Knowledge

- Self-knowledge provides a guiding vision for your life. The more you know your likes, desires, values and goals, the more surely you can move forward and attain your dreams.
- Self-knowledge confers optimism and hopefulness. Optimistic people experience more success. Instead of seeing setbacks as a reflection of their unworthiness, they look for new options and opportunities.
- Self-knowledge increases your self-confidence, helps you meet your goals, and improves your communication with others.
- Self-knowledge is key to finding direction in life and pursuing goals. People who know who they are generally have positive self-esteem and are less afraid

to take chances and make change. Their attitudes tend to be self-fulfilling, which leads them to experience more positive events.

- Self-knowledge is key to being supportive of yourself. Our overall health is affected by the amount of support we experience. The more support we have, the more stable we are. We can't always count on receiving support from other people, however. When we learn to be there for ourselves, we become stronger and self-reliant, and also healthier. We are less likely to become depressed because we can comfort ourselves.
- Self-knowledge confers self-respect. Respecting yourself will enable you to take better care of yourself physically and emotionally. You are worth it, and you know it.
- Self-knowledge is being aware of both your strengths and your weaknesses. Self-knowledge makes you aware of and confident in your strengths, and gives you the wisdom needed to transform your weaknesses.

Tools for Self-Discovery

The rest of this chapter provides tools for becoming more deeply acquainted with yourself and building an accurate, solid foundation and reference point for your self-esteem. I'll show you how to challenge your self-esteem in order to change it, using the same technique you used in the previous chapter.

Take your time. Concentrate. You will discover a wonderful sense of self-acceptance as you work through the material.

- TRY THIS! -

Before you move on to the rest of this chapter, take a half hour in a quiet place and answer the four questions below. Write down your answers in your journal.

1. How do I see myself now?
2. How do I feel about myself?
3. What type of person am I?
4. What do I know about myself?

By the end of this chapter, it will be interesting to review your answers.

Personality

Personality can be defined as a pattern woven by feelings, thoughts, and actions. Your personality makes you one-of-a-kind. It influences your life by playing a part in your behavior and your choices: whether you are sociable at work; whether you want to be your own boss and start a business; whether you want to go out for the evening with a group of friends or would rather rent a movie and stay home.

Two factors play a role in shaping personality: genes and life experiences. Researchers tell us that genes account for about fifty percent of personality; the other fifty percent is influenced by life experience and environment.

Your genes don't change, so the parts of your personality that depend on genetics are consistent over your lifetime. At the same time, your personality continues to evolve in response to life experiences and to influential people such as family, teachers, coaches, and other adults or peers.

Personality Traits

A trait is a specific component of the personality that distinguishes the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves. If you look at personality as a delicious entrée, personality traits blend to make the sauce.

Reflecting on my life both before and after I experienced depression, I can see how a lack of positive self-esteem influenced my personality and the development of certain traits. Because of low self-esteem, I frequently thought negatively about myself and everything around me, and the number and intensity of negative thoughts increased as I grew older. I got to the point where I viewed everything in a negative light. I took things personally. I felt that I had little or no control over my life, yet I also had to have complete control over the events and, sometimes, the people in my life. I had to have people around me and they had to accept me, or I felt horrible about myself. You could say that my personality developed a negative edge, a trait of grouchiness, that became predominant as long my self-esteem remained low.

When I overcame depression and low self-esteem, I noticed that I began to feel more optimistic about most events in my life as they arose. I set some goals and developed discipline and a new drive to achieve them. As a result, my personality shifted; I expressed its more positive aspects, such as cheerfulness and calmness, and these positive traits continue to grow.

The change in how I felt happened by learning about myself. One of the most helpful things I did, which I recommend to you, was to take a personality test. At first I was afraid to take it because of what I might find out. The last thing I wanted was to feel worse about myself. But I took it anyway, and it wasn't that bad. In fact, it helped me enormously. When I went on to research the results, it sparked an interest and I started to feel good about myself. It was exciting to learn things about me that I never knew. I learned a couple of things I didn't like about myself, but I also noticed how those things changed after my depression faded.

Some things I didn't like weren't necessarily bad. In fact, some were actually goods traits. For instance, I learned that I am detail-oriented. In some situations, I create

more work for myself than necessary; yet, in other situations, I get the job done exceptionally well and I'm proud of the end result. I also tend to be an emotional thinker. My husband, on the other hand, is a rational thinker. In many circumstances our styles complement one another, as when we discuss issues and make decisions. By listening to each other, we both bring in valid points and we respect that.

The personality test was one small step that led to many great rewards. There are no right or wrong answers to these tests. They exist solely to help people like us learn what makes us unique.

I have included here resources that make the test available; all you have to do is take the teeny step of contacting your local library or bookstore. You can also go to the web site provided in this chapter and take the personality test that I took. Remember: you're not doing this to find out what is wrong with you but to learn who you are. It is so rewarding.

Some of the following personality assessments are from a business course in leadership. Therefore, some may seem to address personality specifically in the workplace, but you can apply what you learn more broadly.

- TRY THIS! -

Check the answer below that best fits your personality as you know it.

1. In a group setting, I prefer to work on a project as an individual or with the group.
   - ❑ Individual = Individualistic (often people are more creative when working individually)
   - ❑ Group = Team player
2. When I perform a particular task, I often wonder if it could have been done better, or worry that somebody will not like my work.
   - ❑ Yes = Afraid of people judging me
   - ❑ No = Not dependent on other people's acceptance.
3. I prefer not to let people know about my life.
   - ❑ Yes = Reserved
   - ❑ No = Flamboyant
4. I feel that I have to have somebody in my life in order to be secure or happy.
   - ❑ Yes = Dependent
   - ❑ No = Independent

5. I plan my schedule accordingly, so I won't be late.
   - ❑ Yes = Punctual
   - ❑ No = Procrastinate
6. I tend to talk only about myself when around people.
   - ❑ Yes = Selfish
   - ❑ No = Thoughtful of others
7. I generally view the world as an opportunity.
   - ❑ Yes = Optimistic about life
   - ❑ No = Pessimistic about life
8. I like to keep things in some type of organized fashion.
   - ❑ Yes = Organized
   - ❑ No = Disorganized
9. I think of the disadvantages before making a decision.
   - ❑ Yes = I'm a cautious decision-maker
   - ❑ No = I'm careless when making decisions
10. I like to make plans well in advance.
   - ❑ Yes = Planner
   - ❑ No = Spur of the moment; flexible
11. Once I put my mind to something, I can't seem to stick with it when things get difficult.
   - ❑ Yes = Find it hard to continue when things get difficult
   - ❑ No = Persistent
12. I pay close attention to details. For example, when working on a project, I'm interested in giving extra effort.
   - ❑ Yes = Detail-oriented and thorough
   - ❑ No = Not interested in details, just want to get the project done
13. When participating in a group, I'm more comfortable letting others make the decisions.
   - ❑ Yes = Like to follow the lead
   - ❑ No = Like to be the leader
14. I find taking risks exciting.
   - ❑ Yes = Risk taker
   - ❑ No = Conventional
15. When I don't know the answer to something, I'm afraid of other people knowing.
   - ❑ Yes = Lack of self-confidence
   - ❑ No = Secure

16. I feel personally attacked and want to argue or fight back when others suggest that I do things differently, or that I didn't do something the right way.
    - ❑ Yes = Defensive or protective of self
    - ❑ No = Don't worry over people's criticisms or take things personally
17. I generally find fault in people.
    - ❑ Yes = Hypocritical
    - ❑ No = Non-hypocritical
18. I don't mind waiting.
    - ❑ Yes = Patient
    - ❑ No = Impatient
19. I prefer things to stay the same over time.
    - ❑ Yes = I like the status quo
    - ❑ No = Opportunistic
20. When I don't feel that life is meaningful, I am dissatisfied with it.
    - ❑ Yes = A person who needs to have meaning in life
    - ❑ No = A person who doesn't need meaning in life
21. I like things to be exact.
    - ❑ Yes = I like precision
    - ❑ No = I'm open to vagueness
22. I look at situations in realistic terms.
    - ❑ Yes = I tend to be realistic about situations and life
    - ❑ No = I tend to be impractical about situations and life
23. I like to laugh and have fun.
    - ❑ Yes = I like to be upbeat
    - ❑ No = I prefer to be serious

Values

Values are beliefs that we hold to be important. Our values also influence our behavior, as we continually try to live by them. Our values influence our thinking and the judgments we make about what is right and wrong, good and bad.

By prioritizing and organizing values, a value system is created. Value systems are unique for each individual: what is of value to one person may not be to someone else. To one person, family may be a top value; another may value career, religion, or social relationships above all else. We organize our lives around whatever we value most. A person with strong religious values may offer a great deal of service; a person who places a high value on work may choose to work long hours.

Values reflect needs, too. If your need is to be surrounded by family and feel loved, you will be motivated to maintain close ties with family members, and your choices and values will revolve around your family.

We form values in early life according to our environment, culture, experience, and upbringing. Like personality traits, values may be difficult to change. Because our values influence behavior and can be connected to deeper needs, being clear about them assists us in making beneficial choices in our lives.

To learn about the factors that influenced the development of your values, you can examine the culture in which you were raised. You can start with your own family unit. What values were you taught growing up? What values did your family impart to you? Even though a family may share key values, there will still be differences among its members, which stem from differing perceptions, birth order, or gender, among other things. Gender especially can play a major role in one's value system. In many countries, women may place a higher value on family than do men, partly because it is common for girls to be raised playing with dolls and playing house.

Our culture plays a significant role in forming our value system. Cultures vary from place to place. For instance, the culture of the United States is different from that of China. In the United States, high value is placed on the individual. On any given day, if you sit in a populated area and watch people, you'll see all different styles of dress. Each person takes pride in creating a specific look. This is what gives many people a sense of their identity and sets them apart from others within their culture. In China, on the other hand, people appear to place a lower value on the individual. Instead, people in China seem to be more organized around working in teams, groups, and families.

- TRY THIS! -

Read the following list of 41 values. Take some time to decide the importance of each value to you and then select 16 that are the most important to you. Rank them from least important to most important, with 16 being the most important.

Value	**Rank**
Accept values of others	____________
Accomplishment	____________
Ambition and hard work	____________
Apologetic	____________
Appreciation and affection	____________
Caring for others	____________
Commitment	____________
Contributing to your community	____________

Education	____________
Equality	____________
Family	____________
Friends	____________
Generosity	____________
Give more than you take	____________
Happiness	____________
Honesty	____________
Humility	____________
If you break it, you fix it	____________
Independence and self-sufficiency	____________
Individual dignity	____________
Integrity	____________
Job or career	____________
Justice and fairness	____________
Keeping your word	____________
Leisure	____________
Love and affection	____________
Marriage is forever	____________
Never put anyone down	____________
Obedience and duty	____________
Peacekeeping	____________
Personal freedom	____________
Positive communication	____________
Religion/religious faith	____________
Respect for elders	____________
Security	____________
Self-discipline	____________
The environment	____________
Treat others as you want to be treated	____________
Trust	____________
Wisdom and maturity	____________
Work ethic	____________

Values and Behavior

We use various behaviors to express our values. Listed below are several behaviors and their corresponding values.

Value	**Behavior used to obtain value**
Relationships	
Love	Relationship building
Friendship	Devotional, selective
Family	Courageous, defensive
Social respect	Outgoing
Trust	Reliable

Integrity	Honest, truthful
Commitment	Don't give up easily, loyal, dedicated
Respect	Honest, considerate of others, sets boundaries

Value	**Behavior used to obtain value**
Inner fulfillment	
Joy	Cheerful, smiley
Personal security	Precautious, protecting
Harmony	Peacemaker, courteous, honest
Equality	Seek fairness, justice
Religion	Spirituality
A sense of achievement	Goal-seeking, pride
Independence	Self-governing, individualistic
Health	Lifestyle choices
Gratification	Pleasure seeking
Wisdom and knowledge	Self-controlled, understanding, knowledge seeking

What behaviors do I use to obtain the values I desire?

Emotional Intelligence

Another factor that makes up your personality is your ability to read other people's emotions. The extent to which you can do this determines your level of compassion and empathy, and it affects how you communicate with others. If you can mentally put yourself in someone else's shoes and walk in them, you can agree or disagree effectively without alienating others and destroying relationships.

- TRY THIS! -

Do I try to listen to the other person?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Do I feel that the other person has important feelings?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Should the other person be allowed to express his or her feelings?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Am I aware of my own feelings?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Do I understand my feelings and how they affect my behavior?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Am I genuinely concerned about other people's feelings?	❑ Yes	❑ No

Locus of Control

Locus of control is a concept introduced by Julian Rotter in the 1960s. It refers to how a person perceives his level of control over life events. According to Rotter, there are two types of perception. The first type, internal locus of control, holds that events are

a direct result of our own actions. It comprises the belief that we have control over our lives. When we hold this type of perception, we are more likely to attribute both accomplishments and failure to our own efforts. We also tend to think positively. Having a sense of control over events or one's life generally gives a sense of confidence and enhanced motivation.

When we have an external perception, or locus of control, we tend to attribute events to external forces such as chance or luck. We generally do not believe that we have a high degree of control over our lives.

When I was depressed, I felt no control over my problems and life, incapable of making positive events happen. As a result of this, I felt worse about myself. I experienced a link between locus of control and self-esteem level-after I overcame my depression, I experienced having more control over events in my life. You can find a quick assessment for locus of control in Nahavandi's book, The Art and Science of Leadership, which is listed at the end of the chapter.

Conflict: What's Your Style?

Throughout the book, we have seen that conflict in relationships is a source of anxiety and depression. Conflict happens. Everyone, from the happiest person to the most miserable, has to face conflict in life. It was helpful to me to understand the anatomy of conflict. By understanding your conflict style, you can learn more effective ways to resolve conflicts in your relationships. You become equipped to be the peacemaker and find solutions I applied critical thinking to conflict, and it began to affect me differently.

There are two major concerns in a conflict. The first concern is achieving your personal goals. You are in conflict because you have a goal that conflicts with another person's goal. Your goal may be either highly important or of little importance to you.

The second concern is keeping a good relationship with the other person. You may need to work effectively with the person in the future. The relationship may be very important to you, or of little importance. How important your personal goals are to you and how important the relationship is affects how you act in a conflict. Given these two concerns, five styles of managing conflicts have been identified.

Five Styles of Managing Conflict

The Turtle. Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflict. They give up their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from the people they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is hopeless to try to resolve conflicts. They feel helpless. They believe it is easier to withdraw (physically and psychologically) from a conflict than to face it.

The Shark. Sharks try to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them; the relationship is of minor importance. They seek to achieve their goals at all costs. They are not concerned with the needs of the other person. They do not care if others like or accept them. Sharks assume that conflicts are settled by one person winning and one person losing. They want to be the winner. Winning gives Sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of weakness, inadequacy, and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating other persons.

The Teddy Bear. To Teddy Bears, the relationship is of great importance, while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy Bears want to be accepted and liked by other people. They think that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and believe that conflicts cannot be discussed without damaging relationships. They are afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt, which would ruin the relationship. They give up their goals to preserve the relationship. Teddy Bears say, “I’ll give up my goals and let you have what you want in order for you to like me.” Teddy Bears try to smooth over the conflict to avoid harming the relationship.

The Fox. Foxes are moderately concerned with both their own goals and their relationships. Foxes seek a compromise. They give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to give up part of his goals. They seek a solution to conflicts where both sides gain something; the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

The Owl. Owls highly value both their own goals and their relationships. They view conflicts as problems to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their own goals and the goals of the other person in the conflict. Owls see conflicts as improving relationships by reducing tensions between two people. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem. By seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person, Owls maintain the relationship. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their own goals and the other person’s goals. They are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have been fully resolved.

Conflict Resolution

Proverbs state traditional wisdom. Below is a list of 20 proverbs and statements that reflect traditional wisdom for resolving conflicts. Read each one carefully. Using the scale given below, indicate how typical each proverb or statement is of your actions in a conflict.

5 = Very typical of the way I act in a conflict
4 = Frequently typical of the way I act in a conflict
3 = Sometimes typical of the way I act in a conflict
2 = Seldom typical of the way I act in a conflict
1 = Never typical of the way I act in a conflict

____1. Soft words win hard hearts.
____2. Come now and let us reason together.
____3. The arguments of the strongest always have the most weight.
____4. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.
____5. The best way of handling conflicts is to avoid them.
____6. When someone hits you with a stone, hit him with a piece of cotton.
____7. A question must be decided by knowledge and not by numbers if it is to be decided rightly.
____8. If you cannot make a person think as you do, make him do as you think.
____9. Better half a loaf than no bread at all.
____10. If someone is ready to quarrel with you, he isn't worth knowing.
____11. Smooth words make smooth ways.
____12. By digging and digging, the truth is discovered.
____13. He who fights and runs away lives to run another day.
____14. A fair exchange brings no quarrel.
____15. There is nothing so important that you have to fight for it.
____16. Kill your enemies with kindness.
____17. Seek till you find, not lose your labor.
____18. Might overcomes right.
____19. Tit for tat is fair play.
____20. Avoid quarrelsome people; they will only make your life miserable.

Scoring

In the columns below, write your rating for each statement, and then add the total number of points in each column. The higher the total score for each conflict style, the more true that style is for you. The lower the total score for each conflict style, the less true that style is for you. Rank the five conflict styles from most to least frequently used.

TURTLE	SHARK	TEDDY BEAR	FOX	OWL
_____ 5	_____ 3	_____ 1	_____ 4	_____ 2
_____ 10	_____ 8	_____ 6	_____ 9	_____ 7
_____ 15	_____ 13	_____ 11	_____ 14	_____12
_____ 20	_____ 18	_____ 16	_____ 19	_____17
_____Total	____ Total	_____Total	____ Total	____Total

(Adapted from Lawrence and Lorsh, (1987). Credit to Johnson. W. D. (1978). Human Relations and Your Career. A Guide to Interpersonal Skills. Prentice-Hall.)

Resolution

During conflict, do you try to come up with the best possible resolution? If so, which of the following tools do you use?

- ❑ Look for a win-win solution.
- ❑ Like to help solve problems in relations.
- ❑ Listen to what others are saying.
- ❑ Try to communicate effectively with others.
- ❑ Encourage resolution.
- ❑ Understand how the other person is feeling.
- ❑ Encourage others to express and explain their positions.
- ❑ Encourage others to share what they are feeling.
- ❑ Try to resolve the underlying issue, not symptoms such as anger.
- ❑ Encourage the other person to understand what he/she is feeling.
- ❑ Try to see the other person's point of view.
- ❑ Encourage the other person to see my point of view.
- ❑ Want to have a positive end result.

Type A and B Personalities

Each one of us can be categorized as having either a Type A or a Type B personality. These types approach life, problem-solving, and decision-making very differently.

Type A

If you are Type A, you have a strong need to control the situations in daily life. Your world revolves around time. You generally try to accomplish more tasks in the least amount of time; efficiency is your goal. Since you view time with urgency, you always seem to be in a hurry. Consider yourself Type A if when you grocery shop, you start at one end of the store and work your way to the other end. Many people who use this strategy while shopping are time-sensitive. Others will begin shopping at any point

in the store and casually wander around until they eventually end up at the cash register. Type A's tend to be workaholics; they have a preplanned daily schedule and stick to it. Minor changes to the plan can cause frustration. If you are Type A, you are a multitasker par excellence. You multitask even when it isn't necessary. At times you may seem hostile to others, since you get frustrated easily if you have to wait or things don't go as planned. You like to work alone and can be very productive, as you are highly committed. Type A personalities enjoy competition in any situation: school, work, social life, and sports. They are very concerned with getting ahead. They love to win.

Type B

If you are Type B, you are patient, relaxed, and easygoing. You are less rushed, less likely to make a quick decision, more diligent, and less likely to have outbursts or out-of-control anger. You are easy to get along with and express your emotions calmly. These characteristics, along with a pleasant demeanor, the ability to control excitement, and fearlessness in the face of trauma, allow you to cope with stress effectively. Type B's are more flexible than Type A's.

Which Are You?

Answer the following statements.

A.	I feel relaxed.	❑ Yes	❑ No
B.	I am always on time.	❑ Yes	❑ No
C.	I stay calm during stressful and traumatic events.	❑ Yes	❑ No
D.	I am an easy-going type of person.	❑ Yes	❑ No
E.	I find myself often in a rush to go somewhere or get something done.	❑ Yes	❑ No
F.	I want others to hurry.	❑ Yes	❑ No
G.	I must win.	❑ Yes	❑ No
H.	I don't get confused under pressure.	❑ Yes	❑ No
I.	I don't like to stop until I get the job done.	❑ Yes	❑ No
J.	I let others work and play at their own pace and style.	❑ Yes	❑ No

Score: Type A's may answer yes to questions B, E, F, G, and I, while B's may answer yes to questions A, C, D, H, and J.

Key Personality Traits: Fine-Tuning Your Vision

Select your top five traits from the list below. Write down how you see yourself using these traits and how they can help you be more successful in your life.

Personality Trait	Most Like Me
ACCURATE: Work free from error or mistakes; careful, precise; detailed	__________
ACTIVE: Lively; agile; high-energy; busy	__________
ADVENTUROUS: Try new things; take risks	__________
ANALYTICAL: Examine and separate the parts of something to find its essential meaning	__________
ARTISTIC: Appreciation of or ability in the arts	__________
ATTENTIVE: Listen well; pay close attention to verbal and nonverbal messages	__________
ASTUTE: Perceptive; clever; insightful	__________
CALM: Remain peaceful, composed, and serene under pressure	__________
CAUTIOUS: Careful; prudent; exercise forethought	__________
COMPASSIONATE: Considerate; sympathetic; humane	__________
COLLABORATIVE: Working in a team	__________
COMPETENT: Skilled; qualified; capable	__________
COMPETITIVE: Strive to win; oppose a rival	__________
CONCEPTUAL: Intuitive; abstract or reflective thinking	__________
CONCERNED: Care and high regard	__________
CREATIVE: Imaginative; inventive; original	__________
DECISIVE: Show firm determination in using judgment to make decisions	__________
DEXTEROUS: Well-coordinated; handy; adroit	__________
DIPLOMATIC: Tactful; skillful at negotiating	__________
DISCREET: Showing good judgment; keeping confidences	__________
DYNAMIC: Energetic; vigorous	__________
EMPATHIC: Sensitive to or identify with the feelings of others; warm	__________
ENTHUSIASTIC: Show interest and excitement; expressive	__________
FIRM: Unlikely to change mind; adamant; certain	__________
FLEXIBLE: Adaptable; versatile	__________
FORESIGHTED: Realize what is likely to happen in the future	__________

HONEST: Truthful; genuine; having integrity; straightforward __________
LOGICAL: Rational; analytical; reasonable __________
OPEN-MINDED: Impartial; receptive to new ideas; free from prejudice or bigotry __________
ORGANIZED: Structured; orderly; systematic __________
OUTGOING: Sociable; friendly __________
PERCEPTIVE: Observant; keen insight or awareness __________
PERSISTENT: Refuse to give up; persevere __________
PERSUASIVE: Influence or lead others __________
PRACTICAL: Realistic; pragmatic; down-to-earth __________
RESPONSIBLE: Dependable; trustworthy; reliable; loyal __________
SENSIBLE: Showing good sense; sound judgment __________
SOPHISTICATED: Cultured; world-wise __________
STRONG: Powerful __________

(c) University of Denver Career Center.

Before you start with the next exercises, I encourage you to try two more trait assessments to learn even more about yourself. These two assessments are very popular and it is easy to find a lot of information on them. The first one is the Myers-Briggs Personality Type assessment. This was the first assessment I took, and it was a real eye-opener for me. I learned a lot about who I am by using this tool. Eight traits describe 16 different types of people. The traits are Extraversion, Introversion, Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, Feeling, Judging, and Perceiving. (The personality types are described using the first letter of each trait).

The first time I took the test, when I was depressed, I was an ISFP. I'm sure if I retook the test now, I'd have different results. After taking the test, I took the time to learn more about the traits. You can do this too. On the Myers-Briggs web site, after you take the assessment, you can click on a link that takes you to another site that describes your traits. It tells you what you are good at doing, and names several famous people who match your traits.

The Myers Briggs web site is at *www.myersbriggs.org*.

Or you can find similar tests for free on sites such as:
www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes1.htm.

The second tool I recommend is the Big-Five personality assessment. This groups our traits into five categories: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. You can find it at:
www.pao.gov.ab.ca/toolkit/tools/assessing-the-big-five.htm.

Your Self-Esteem

Congratulations! You have just completed a significant and rewarding journey that will continue to unfold as you go forward.

At the beginning of the chapter, you described your feelings and knowledge about yourself. Now we are going to apply critical thinking to that description. Start by reevaluating your past views, reference points, and understanding about yourself. Begin to question any negative thoughts you have about yourself. Slow down and listen to your negative self-talk.

Work through the following questions.

On what past events am I basing my self-esteem (what am I using as a reference point)?

____

____

____

____

Is this accurate knowledge on which to base your self-esteem? Of course not. Now you can work through your feelings so you can base your self-esteem on accurate and truthful knowledge about yourself. Acknowledge that you have an unmet need for self-esteem and are trying to change your old negative beliefs about yourself. Anchoring your self-esteem to an unmet need can lead to faulty, negative thinking about yourself. As a result of anchoring esteem to a past event and an unmet need, it is easy to form wrong conclusions. Ask yourself, "What assumptions did I form about myself as a result of the past event?"

From the list below, identify the faulty reasoning that influenced the faulty assumption you have made about yourself, in association with the past event.

- ❑ Vague images and information
- ❑ Faulty feelings
- ❑ Similar experiences
- ❑ Lack of facts
- ❑ Faulty opinions
- ❑ Outside influences
- ❑ Fallacies

- ❑ Inferences
- ❑ Faulty reasoning
- ❑ Missing information
- ❑ Emotional thinking
- ❑ Inaccurate information
- ❑ Lack of information
- ❑ Oversimplification

Now, discover the truth about yourself. Search for facts and truthful information about yourself. Ask the following question,"*What new information can I use to form a new view about myself? How does this new information influence what I believe about myself?* Also include accurate information that you have just learned about yourself from the assessments you've taken.

From the assessments, describe the following about yourself:

1. My personality:
2. My values:
3. My beliefs:
4. Other facts or positive information about myself.

- TRY THIS! -

In the worksheet below, compare the new facts with your old assumptions about yourself. In section a) write down the old assumptions you hold about yourself. In section b), identify and write down the reference points that you based your self-esteem on in the old days. In section c), list the correct, new information that you have discovered during your reflections. In section d), list the new reference point (facts) you will now base your self-esteem on. Finally, use section e) to compare the old information to the new, more accurate information and reference point, and form a new conclusion about yourself.

a. Old Assumptions:

____

____

____

____

____

b. Old Reference Point:

c. New Information/Facts:

d. New Reference Point:

e. New Conclusion:

Now try comparing the old beliefs to the new information about your-self. Do you see how your original feelings and beliefs about yourself were incorrect? How do you think your negative feelings and faulty thinking could have been wrong?

Take time to ponder and answer the following questions in your journal.

- After comparing the old assumptions about myself with my new conclusions, how does learning the truth make me feel about myself?
- Have I overlooked something good that could have resulted from the incident? If so, what?
- What information and facts do I want to anchor my self-esteem to now and in the future-always?

Take a moment to write about how you see yourself now. It might be fun to compare the original description that you wrote earlier in this chapter, to see how your self-image has changed.

My hope is that you will now see how wonderful and beautiful you are as a person; how you have always been that person, but didn't even know yourself. You now have the foundation on which to establish your self-esteem. This is accurate information about yourself; it does not come from another person. You now have to make the decision to accept the new view of yourself and continue to do so. No one can take the truth away from you, but only you have the power to choose to accept it. Make the decision to base your self-esteem on the truth that you have gained in your journey of self-discovery.

Something we were withholding made us weak
until we found it was ourselves.
ROBERT FROST

Resources

Nahavandi, A. *The Art and Science of Leadership*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2003. This book contains some personality assessments.

Riso, Don Richard, and Russ Hudson. *Personality Types: Using the Enneagram for Self Discovery*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

You can also find information about using enneagrams here:
<http://www.enneagraminstitute.com>

Ryan, M.J. *Trusting Yourself: How to Stop Feeling Overwhelmed and Live More Happily with Less Effort*. New York: Broadway Books, 2004.

The Big-Five personality traits were described by two men, Gordon Allport and H.S. Odbert, who state that there are five traits which each individual will possess in varying degrees. These five traits are

1. Neuroticism: The tendency to experience unpleasant emotions.
2. Extroversion: The energy and tendency to be social.
3. Agreeableness: The tendency to cooperate with others.
4. Conscientiousness: A tendency to have self-discipline and desire for achievement.
5. Openness to experience: A positive attitude or appreciation for adventure or new ideas.

Big-Five personality test online:
<http://www.pao.gov.ab.ca/toolkit/tools/assessing-the-big-five>

12

Step 8

Forgivness: Why Bother?

Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds
on the heel that has crushed it.
MARK TWAIN

Long after an event is over, we remember what we felt as it happened. This wonderful capacity to remember feelings can cause happiness or sadness. Movies, songs, fragrances, other people–all these help us to remember past events and the feelings that arose within us. We might hear a song that reminds us of a very exciting period in our lives; see a movie about a love relationship that triggers old feelings of love for someone we once knew; smell a certain flower that brings back the delight of a special place.

Some of us remember traumatic and hurtful events more easily than happy occasions, however. Each time the mind recalls painful events, negative thoughts and feelings associated with the event can be overwhelming. For many of us, old hurts that we've not dealt with pile up until we become bitter and cynical. The hurt then turns into anger and resentment, which we feel every time we hear the song we associated with a relationship, for example. It's as if we are on a merry-go-round of misery. We can't stop thinking of that which hurts us the most.

Our constant focus on the pain can be like a curse; we can't get free from it. When you begin to face all your resentments, you may feel helpless and overwhelmed. You may wonder how in the world you can ever be free.

Truly speaking, forgiveness is the only way to get free from the pain.

The Forgiving Heart

Research shows that resentment and bitterness, hanging on to old hurts, causes illness. Some doctors claim that the distress and mental depression from an unforgiving attitude produce toxic substances in the body that either build up or contribute to diseases such as arthritis, cancer, and heart disease.

At the same time, research shows that people who forgive are generally healthier than people who don't. In one study that explored the effects of forgiveness, participants were asked to discuss two incidents of betrayal that they had experienced, one by a parent and one by a friend or romantic partner. As they talked about their experiences, researchers measured the subjects' blood pressure, heart rate, forehead muscle tension, and skin conduction responses. The results indicated that blood pressure rates and forgiveness are directly related. An individual who is more forgiving will have lower resting blood pressure and smaller increases in blood pressure rates. An individual who is less forgiving will experience higher resting blood pressure and higher increases in blood pressure rates. The results could indicate why people with forgiving hearts reported fewer physician visits for physical ailments. Forgiveness appears to promote better overall health because high forgivers seem to be more empathetic and warm, and experience more positive emotions toward their transgressors.

The Anatomy of a Grudge

It is hard to want to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply. It is even harder to forgive someone who has not sought forgiveness. Hurt lodges somewhere in us and develops into a grudge that activates each time we see the person, think of him, or are reminded of him in any way. It seems easier not to forgive.

We choose not to forgive because we want to hold somebody else responsible for the pain they caused us. We think that if we forgive, we've released them from the consequences of their actions. This thinking makes forgiving hard to do because we want the person to make the wrong right or to pay for the pain, much like a debt.

There may be times when we have been hurt so badly that we find it difficult or impossible to release the transgressor. In this type of situation, we feel it is better not to forgive because the grudge acts as a barrier of protection. This protective barrier helps save us from being hurt again by that person in the future. It also helps us avoid being hurt by other people in similar situations, by not allowing ourselves to become vulnerable. For example, if you've ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend cheat on you, you may have a tendency not to fully trust the opposite sex in hopes of not being hurt again.

Why Choose to Forgive?

When we are unforgiving, we cannot love ourselves. Instead, we become more judg-

mental and condemn both others and ourselves. Harboring grudges and failing to forgive damages our self-esteem. When we are unforgiving, we hurt ourselves. We feel self-hatred, self-blame, and our self-esteem plunges in feelings of negativity. We are grouchy; we treat others badly, and we treat ourselves worse because of the stress we feel. We devalue ourselves by directing negative thoughts and feelings inward. We get stuck in dark feelings and a judgmental and revengeful attitude. We have a chip on our shoulder.

Often we do our best to unload our misery onto others. We may feel good for a moment when we put someone down or treat them poorly, taking our anger out on them, but we soon return to feeling negative about ourselves. Through the years, as memory continues to replay the same old negative thoughts and feelings associated with the event, the self-damage accelerates. We should ask ourselves, "Do I want to condemn myself and other people to a life of misery?"

When we start to forgive, we start the process of taking care of ourselves. We allow the barriers between ourselves and others to dissolve when we surrender our negative feelings toward both ourselves and the offender. As a result, we begin to heal from the emotional pain we've been lugging around for such a long time. Anger and feelings of revenge begin to dissipate. We can actually breathe!

Forgiving Yourself, Forgiving Others

Ideal forgiveness is a two-way street. It is only complete when both parties acknowledge their part in what happened. Complete forgiveness, then, is a process of reconciliation between the transgressor and the victim. The transgressor recognizes his wrongful actions. The victim identifies the hurt and reappraises the emotion, going through a change in how he thinks and feels about the transgressor and the act.

When there is a relationship of deep love and trust, it is easier to take a leap of faith and trust the other person not to hurt you again. If there is a lack of love or trust in a relationship, it is much harder to take that leap of faith. Instead, you protect yourself by erecting a barrier.

When I was in this situation, I had to stop and ask myself what I could do when there was no trust and love in the relationship, and when the offender wouldn't ask for forgiveness or wasn't around. After I changed how I felt about myself and my depression, I still felt pain, and I still needed to be healed from the pain. However, as I began to reflect back over the painful events in my life, I saw myself as my worst offender.

How? You may well ask. I had allowed myself to think badly about myself because of someone else's actions. I played the biggest role in lowering my self-esteem.

There are times when we blame ourselves for what someone else has done to us.

For example, the spouse who has been betrayed may feel that she is responsible for her mate's infidelity. Initially she may blame her partner, but then she directs her negative feelings toward herself and begins to think that she is not good enough, or that she may have done something to push her partner away. As she continues to put herself down, the pain of the situation grows and depression sets in.

When we choose not to forgive, we continue to criticize and hate ourselves because of someone else's actions. It is imperative that we allow ourselves to be healed from the pain. This means forgiving ourselves for allowing negative self-talk to occur, for criticizing and devaluing our own self-worth. If we forgive ourselves, we can push through the pain that somebody else caused us. I invite you to try this. Believe me: you don't lose anything by forgiving yourself. Rather, you receive the gift of freedom to love and accept yourself exactly as you are. With this love and acceptance, you honor, respect, and value yourself. For the first time, you step fully into your life.

You can start this process by listening to yourself. We can be so busy listening to other people and looking at images that we never take the time to slow down to hear our negative self-talk. If we try, however, we can hear the constant self-blame and put-downs that cause us to feel self-rejection. If you are like I was, negative self-talk is habitual. Once habitual, it seems impossible to stop. Self-rejection only increases the hurt you already feel about yourself. It is faulty thinking that leads us to dislike or hate ourselves because of someone else's behavior.

Forgiveness and Relationships

Refusing to forgive is actually a misguided effort to satisfy our need for love. We desire fulfilling relationships. Our lives evolve around wanting love from those closest to us. We even want love, disguised as respect and integrity, from people we don't know. For instance, we expect the sales clerk to treat us kindly and may get upset if he is grouchy. We hold other people accountable to treat us according to our expectations. We want our partners and family members to show us how much we are loved. Spouses want to be remembered on special occasions and receive a gentle embrace that shows love. Children want and need to know they are special in their parents' eyes and to their peers. We expect other people to show us love if we are to be happy. When we don't feel special to the people we love the most, we feel unloved. We feel hurt and want those people to make it right with us, so we can once again feel loved. Therefore, forgiveness is needed to bring people together. It settles disagreements and disputes, which brings peace to our hearts and minds.

Forgiveness Interrelated to Our Needs

Lack of forgiveness can be linked to the satisfaction of a certain need on Maslow's

Hierarchy. At some time in life, we each decide what values and morals we want to live by in order to feel happy about ourselves and to enjoy life. If we can maintain these values and morals, then we can continue to be happy. When one of our values is threatened, when someone treats us unfairly or wrongs us, we become protective and react to uphold the value.

For example, if you believe that respect and integrity are needed in a relationship and that those values reflect love, then when your partner tells you a big lie, you question his integrity, begin to mistrust him, and ultimately question the extent of love that he has for you. If you feel the person no longer loves you, you are hurt and sad. This carries over to our other relationships. We have values and morals in our relationships with our employers, coworkers, professors, family, spouses, friends, family physicians, business partners, auto mechanics, and neighbors.

Whose Responsibility Is It Anyway?

Consider this: Is it really somebody else's responsibility and job to satisfy your unmet needs, so you can love and accept yourself? You can make the choice not to hold anyone else accountable either for how you feel or for your failures. If you hold another person responsible for meeting your needs, you'll never forgive or move forward with your life. *Don't rely solely on another person to meet your needs so that you can accept yourself.* If you do, you make your well-being dependent upon someone else; you allow your happiness to rest upon someone else's shoulders instead of taking responsibility for it yourself. If you do this, you can't put forth a hundred percent of your effort to make the necessary changes in your life.

Deciding to Forgive Ourselves

Self-forgiveness begins by realizing how we have directed our pain inward and what this has done to us. No one can make us believe anything, including negative things about ourselves. Yet, we have often chosen to believe that an act committed against us has somehow made us bad, unworthy, useless, and so on.

When we understand how we are responsible for our self-esteem, we have the power to stop rejecting ourselves and putting ourselves down. It doesn't matter what someone else does or doesn't do. Until we realize this, however, we will continue to think negatively about ourselves, and the hole in our hearts will not go away. We will stay in the wretched cycle of low self-esteem.

Self-forgiveness involves extending acceptance and peace rather than animosity and bitterness toward both yourself and the offender. You will feel as if a big burden has been lifted, partly because you no longer direct negative thoughts and feelings toward yourself. Self-forgiveness creates personal growth and love. It puts you in the

driver's seat, but you have to take the first step by deciding that you want to honor, respect, and value yourself. You have to stop judging yourself for what happened, and stop judging the other person, too.

Self-forgiveness is needed to move on with your life. Whatever you've been basing your depression and low self-esteem on, it is likely that it is connected to a lack of forgiveness.

While it is really important to forgive others, it is also wise not to forget what happened, thus becoming a doormat. By remembering a hurt after you've completely forgiven it, you can protect yourself from being hurt in the same way again, perhaps by the same person. Your concern as a person who needs and wants to forgive is to be free of hatred, resentment, and depression. Once you forgive, you are free. Hopefully the other person will acknowledge the wrong or hurt he's imposed on you, but that's not your concern.

How Do You Forgive Yourself?

Once you realize that you are condemning yourself because of what somebody else has done, you have the power to control this reaction. Upon catching yourself doing this, you can choose to replace negative thoughts about yourself with true, positive thoughts.

In learning to forgive yourself, you become aware of your own faulty behavior and how you've wronged yourself. Forgiving yourself gives you the understanding that you've treated yourself wrongly and unfairly. You made yourself the victim of your own hatred; you now have the choice to break the chain of hate.

So how, really, do you forgive? How do you get rid of the pain of having rejected yourself for years because of someone else's actions; how do you make it right? You can rid yourself of this pain by recognizing that you decided and allowed, on your own, to think negatively about yourself. Thus, in some way you are as much at fault as the person who hurt you. Now, by stepping back and looking at the big picture, you will be able to see beyond the confines of your own concerns. This is the opposite of the tunnel vision that can keep you stuck in low self-esteem and depression. The big picture will reveal to you that all the pain and damage that has been caused by your learned pattern of thinking can be mended with critical thinking. Critical thinking gives you the ability to love yourself regardless of anyone's behavior. You may feel remorse, or you may try to deny that you are responsible for the damage you caused yourself, but you must see it before you can step into self-forgiveness.

When someone has hurt you or blocked you from satisfying one of your needs, instead of making that person the holder of your universe, you can remind yourself

that you are in control of your life. If your blocked need is for love, remember that loving yourself is not dependent upon whether someone else loves you according to how you want to be loved. Instead, reflect back to what you know about yourself: self-love comes from you. If you love yourself, you will choose to respect yourself and to stop the merry-go-round of self-blame and self-hatred. Forgiving yourself means you're no longer part of the problem, but instead you are the solution.

- TRY THIS! -

Take some time alone to reflect and then describe a recent circumstance when you thought something negative about yourself. What role did you play in creating this thought? Consider whether you had a choice about criticizing yourself. What belief about yourself can you change to erase this thought and belief?

Describe how you have hurt yourself as a consequence of the painful situations in your life.

Ask yourself: Am I trying to get an unmet need filled? Do I feel one of my needs is being threatened and I'm trying to protect it? Am I holding somebody else responsible for my needs?

❑ Yes ❑ No

Who?

How and why?

Steps to Start Forgiving Yourself

Step One: Identify the act against you that triggered hurtful, painful feelings.

Step Two: Realize that if you are passing judgment on yourself for what happened, you are blocking your own self-love. Remember: You have a choice in this.

Step Three: Choose to forgive yourself for judging and condemning yourself because of someone else's actions.

Step Four: Choose to love and accept yourself because of who you are: a worthy human being. You deserve love and respect from yourself as well as from others. You have a reason for being in this world, and no one can take that from you.

Step Five: Consider that other people are not responsible for how you feel about yourself and your failures. Release the person who hurt you from the responsibility of giving you love and acceptance. Realize that you have a choice whether to forgive and release or to continue to feel offended, victimized, and hurt.

Forgiveness List

In the following section, list the names of people who have hurt you in the past.

Person 1:

(Name)________________________Made me feel:______________________

____
____
____
____

In the spaces below, list the incidents when this person hurt you and how you were affected.

Incident #1

____
____
____
____

Incident #2

____
____
____
____

I, _____________, choose to release _____________________, and I am solely responsible for meeting my needs and for loving and accepting myself.

Person 2:

(Name) ___________________ *Made me feel*___________________________

____

____

____

____

In the spaces below, list the incidents when this person hurt you and how you were affected.

Incident #1

____

____

____

____

Incident #2

____

____

____

____

I, ___________________, choose to release _________________________, and I am solely responsible for meeting my needs and for loving and accepting myself.

Forgiveness Commitment

Forgiveness requires that we commit ourselves strongly to it. You can say to yourself, "I intend to forgive myself and all people who have harmed me or who have hurt me in any way, because I no longer choose to live bound to hatred, resentment, and bitterness. I choose to love and respect myself."

Use the next exercise for as many incidents as you need to.

Person I forgive: (Your Own Name) __________________________________

What I am forgiving myself for and why:

____

____

____

____

The negative feelings arise (self-hatred, condemnation, etc.), I choose to release (who and why):

____
____
____
____

Exercise

This exercise will help you see yourself and your feelings more clearly. In the following chart, make a list of the key people in your life and note whether you experience them to be *loving* or *condemning*.

Condemning	*Loving*
________________	________________
________________	________________
________________	________________
________________	________________
________________	________________
________________	________________

It is likely that some of the people you find to be condemning are on your Forgiveness List. By identifying people who we are condemning, we can recognize that perhaps we need to reapply the steps in the book. This could signal that more critical thinking needs to take place.

Commitment

It is time now for you to release the people in your life whom you judge and whom you need to forgive. This is your commitment.

I choose to love these people instead of judging them.

Names:

____
____
____
____

We forgive to the extent that we love.

FRANCOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Resources

Hallowell, Edward. *Dare to Forgive*. Health Communications, 2004.
Henderson, Michael. *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate*. Bookpartners, 1999.

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Step 9

Finding Direction In Life

Vision is seeing the invisible.
JONATHAN SWIFT

As Robert was running the last mile of the marathon, his heart was pounding; although he was running out of energy quickly, he wouldn't let himself give up. Determined to cross the finish line in first place, he told himself, "I'm going to win the race; I want to win; I can do it, just try harder." As he talked to himself, he could feel his legs working harder and faster. He could see two people still in front of him, so he knew he'd have to push harder to pass them. His strategy was to focus only on the moment at hand.

First, he concentrated on catching up to the man directly in front of him. He told himself to run faster. Slowly, he made his way up to the man. Then, as he passed that runner, he felt sure that he could overtake the next runner, who was in first place. Robert pushed himself hard, harder than he ever had before. Suddenly, he was running side by side for first place. Giving the race every ounce of energy and effort and passion that he had, he crossed the finish line one step ahead of the other runner, and won the race.

Robert threw his hands up in the air and sighed in relief as he claimed victory. He had done it. In that moment, he experienced one of the biggest highs of his life. He was ecstatic.

I include this story because it describes how it feels to accomplish something that you have set your heart on, and I believe that if you have come this far in the book you have overcome your depression or, at the very least, are on the road to overcoming it. You deserve to feel like Robert, and you will.

Now it's time to focus on where you're going from here.

Self-Actualization

Maslow's idea of self-actualization is for us to be all that we can be and that self-actualization is the pinnacle of human accomplishment. I believe that we are self-actualized when we live every day peacefully, with contentment, and are happy with life and the direction it is heading. When we live in this way, we find life to be fulfilling and meaningful. Getting up in the morning is a happy occasion.

This state of being radiates out to others and gives them hope. We all want to shine with inner contentment, and when we see it in another, though we may not know what to call it, we want it. True contentment is extremely attractive. When your life is heading down the right path and you know it, you have achieved one of the greatest treasures of life.

What Is Success to You?

At this point you know that by using critical thinking you can decide for yourself what success is. You don't need the Internet, ads on TV, movies, or other cultural standards telling you what you need or who you are. As an independent thinker, you recognize not only that the power of the media and marketing is strong, but that you can put it all aside: you can dress the way you want to, drive the kind of car you want to drive, work at the kind of job or in the profession that pleases you, and live where you live, even if none of these things match the American ideal.

Marketing saturates our culture. It seduces with humor, beauty, sex, money, and all kinds of fantasies. It adds pressure to our lives by bombarding us with images and words that all say the same thing: "Buy, buy, buy, and you'll be good enough." When our culture views us only as a source of income and demands that we mold ourselves to its dictates, our self-esteem is challenged daily.

As an independent thinker, you know that your beauty, wealth, and worth are inside of you, and you can think for yourself. As you grow to know this, you begin to taste true happiness and go beyond the stereotypical markings of success.

As you read the next section, think of yourself as a self-actualizing person.

Characteristics of Self-Actualized People

Confident

Self-actualized people are unthreatened by the unknown and instead are confident in their ability to reason, to see the truth and logic of a situation.

Self-Accepting

Self-actualized individuals are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and are willing to accept themselves despite their weaknesses.

Has a Mission in Life

Self-actualized people are motivated to keep learning about life. They want to maintain their sense of self-actualization and continue to experience personal growth.

Need for Independence

Self-actualized individuals don't feel lonely when alone, but use the time for more discovery and to complete their mission or to gain strength and wisdom.

Self-Starter

Self-actualized people see potential all around. They look for ways to create new moments.

Visionary

Self-actualized individuals have feelings of limitless horizons, of power, and have a clear picture of where they want their lives to go.

Truth-Seeking

Self-actualized people regard truth as very important. They see relationships as valuable and are capable of having few, but very intimate, relationships with others because they know how to share love with others. They know how to be affectionate and are aware of others' needs for love.

Goal-Oriented

Self-actualized people know what goals they want to accomplish and why. They enjoy the process of reaching their goals and find peace during that time because it is valuable learning time. They know how to get their goal and uphold ethical standards in the process.

Existential

Self-actualized people feel that they understand their reason for being.

Leadership

Self-actualized individuals have leadership traits in their personal lives. They are not controlled by other people or the culture.

The Self-Actualization Process

There are two processes necessary for self-actualization: self-exploration and action. The deeper your self-exploration, the closer you come to self-actualization.

Self-exploration is the process of understanding who you are. As you continue the journey of self-exploration that you began with this book, you'll uncover more and understand more of who you are and what you really desire in life. Your deeper needs and desires may have been buried as you were preoccupied with trying to satisfy the needs associated with the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. But as you succeed in meeting these basic needs and your deeper desires come into awareness, you can begin to fulfill them and move higher toward self-actualization.

Your direction is set and the process of moving toward it will be unique to you. It will unfold as you seek your goal, guided by your own inner wisdom, using your feeling and thoughts to steer you in the direction of your dreams and passions.

To begin the process, ask questions and listen for the answers. Sometimes they come from within and sometimes from outside, but your heart will always confirm when the answer is true. You just have to listen.

Self-Exploration

- TRY THIS! -

Ponder the questions listed below and write your desires in the chart provided. Don't get caught up in those personal or career desires that only temporarily fulfill your needs for self-esteem or self-acceptance. Remember: self-esteem and acceptance come from your inner foundation, not solely from outside factors such as accomplishments or recognition.

For example, many people believe that their job defines who they are. But a job is just what you do for a living. If you are given a title, you earned the right to be called that, no more, no less. When the job is over, the title is gone, and you are still who you are. If you don't know this and identify with your job, and you lose it for any reason, then you will suffer a loss of self-esteem and perhaps have an identity crisis, all of which can lead to depression.

Ask yourself the following questions to gain an idea of the direction you want your career, personal life, and family life to go in.

For your career desires, consider the following questions:

1. What do I have a passion for?
2. What would motivate me to start each day?
3. What type of job will satisfy me?
4. What am I good at?
5. Where do I want my career path to take me?
6. Where do I want my job to be in 5, 10, 20 years from now?

Consider the following questions for your personal life:

1. What do I want to do with my life?
2. What do I want to change about myself and my lifestyle?
3. What do I desire to accomplish?
4. What do I see myself doing that will bring me more happiness?

Consider what you want to accomplish in your family and social life:

1. How do I see my family, social, and home life now?
2. Is there anything I want to change or make better?
3. Does my connection with my family or social life bring me the satisfaction I desire?
4. Am I contributing to other people in the way I want to? (For example, am I showing my children the love they need and desire? Am I helping them to grow emotionally into healthy adults?)
5. Is there anything I can help change in my family or social life that will help others to grow and be successful?
6. Am I communicating effectively? Do we understand each other correctly?
7. Do I know what my family's needs are?

How does each area of your life motivate you? What is it that you want from your career, personal life, family and social life, finances, and health?

Career

____

____

____

____

Personal Life

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____

____

____

Family/Social Life

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____

____

____

Finances

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____

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Health

____

____

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____

Vision

When I was taking management courses in school, I had to locate some businesses over the Internet and find out what their visions and missions were. After doing this, I was inspired to have a vision of my own for my future. Your vision will keep you on track through the ups and downs you'll encounter on your journey.

Once you've explored your desires in life, you can begin to envision your future and how you want your life to be. Visualize each category of your life: personal, family or home life, finances, and career. Write about your vision for each category.

What you come up with will suggest the steps you need to take to get where you want to be. Your vision will inspire you to fulfill your desires. It will give you hope to press on and reach your dreams.

Visualize exactly where you want to be, both now and in the future. You will run into some bumps along the way, but your vision will give you the strength to press on and not quit when things get tough.

Goals

In order to accomplish what you envision, you have to establish steppingstones or intermediate goals to help you get there. When setting goals, make them attainable. Your vision should include both short-term and long-term goals.

Goals must be measurable and have a specific time frame in which they can be accomplished. Manage your goals and vision by revisiting them frequently, making sure you still understand what they are and your plan to get you there. Long-term goals-five years, ten years, and so on-should be reviewed every six months to a year. Shorter-term goals-monthly, three months, six months to a year-need to be reviewed more often.

Keep track of your progress toward your goals. You should also regularly reevaluate your goals against your vision to ensure that you are still heading along your chosen path, as well as to discover whether your desires or options have changed.

- TRY THIS! -

List goals for each category in the space provided.

Goal Category	Goal Statement	Start Date	Projected Completion Date
Family or home life			
Personal			
Career			
Financial			
Health			

Progress Sheet for Goals

Goal One ______________ Date __________________

Progress Update:

____

____

____

____

Goal Two_______________ Date __________________

Progress Update:

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Goal Three _______________ Date __________________

Progress Update:

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Goal Four _______________ Date __________________

Progress Update:

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Goal Five _______________ Date __________________

Progress Update:

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____

Design Your Plan

You now have a vision, a direction, and some goals. It is time to design a plan and manage how you will get where you want to be. To determine what steps you need to take to reach your goals, you may need to do some research on the topic. For example, if your goal is to make more money this year, you may need to research going back to school or investment strategies, or you may need to look for a better job. By applying critical thinking to this task, you'll realize that you don't always know everything. One frequently has to search for more information.

In addition, you need to make sure that your knowledge is accurate. Without accurate, reliable information, your options may appear limited. Therefore, search until you find and uncover as many options as possible. Asking questions is always a helpful way to discover new information. The more information you have, the more likely you'll be to make realistic and accurate decisions.

While making decisions, be sure to use the steps outlined in Chapter 4 (Getting Control of Your Life). Determine what to base your decisions on, and allow time for self-reflection to find any faulty assumptions.

Taking Action

Now that you have a designated plan and everything is set up, you can begin to take action. Try to carry out one project at a time, beginning with what you most want to accomplish. Prioritize your goals by identifying which ones are most important and what actions are necessary to accomplish those goals.

You are now well on your way.

The greatest part of our happiness depends on
our disposition, not our circumstances.
MARTHA WASHINGTON

Resources

Ditzeler, Jinny S. *Your Best Year Yet. New York:* Warner, 1994.

Secunda, Al. *The 15 Second Principle.* New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999.

Warren, Neil Clark. *Finding Contentment: When Momentary Happiness Just Isn't Enough.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997.

Topachievement. At this web site, you'll find additional tips and articles to help set and achieve goals, as well as additional resources.
<www.topachievement.com/goalsetting.html>

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Step 10

Positive Living

And in the end it's not the years in your life that count.
It's the life in your years.
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Over the centuries, philosophers have shared a common certainty that thoughtful assessment and analysis are valuable activities. A philosopher is not attached to any idea or concept but, rather, lets go of those that prove to be invalid and untrue and applies those that work. A philosopher seeks to understand what standards to apply to each problem or decision. By reflecting in this way, a philosopher applies critical thinking to life. While some people are willing to live "the unexamined life," a philosopher, or critical thinker, insists on knowing the truth.

By learning about yourself and how to think critically, you ensure your personal growth for the rest of your life. Using the steps in this book, you can maintain and continue to develop your self-esteem, self-knowledge, and positive attitude. You will meet life's challenges successfully.

With each new challenge, you will see that you have more control than you ever thought. You can decide how best to deal with the highs and lows of life. You will experience fewer feelings of being overwhelmed as you continue to apply critical thinking, which allows you to stop fighting against the forces that depress you and to confront them instead, to be open to them and learn from them. Critical thinking opens your mind so that you have greater awareness of each situation and of your life as a whole.

In relationships, this approach breaks the cycle of resistance and defensive behavior. You are no longer self-absorbed and focused on winning, but instead are ready to understand and work with others.

How to Make Quick, Effective Decisions

Since you won't always have time to go through the whole decision-making process, you can make effective decisions by using three quick and easy steps.

Decide what is the problem.

Listen to your feelings and emotions, and recognize what they are trying to tell you. When a problem arises, you may be able to recognize some of the behavior patterns you learned about while reading this book, so you can begin to analyze why you acted in a particular manner. (Chapter 7 covered personality types and behaviors, such as people pleasing, acting out, pulling in, rescuing, looking good, non-feeling, troubling, entertaining, enabling.) You can also look for irrational thinking and its causes, such as fear or anger.

Identify what information you are bringing to the problem, and if the information is accurate and true.

Use your critical thinking skills to help determine this. Note bias or stereotyping. Ask if each piece of information you have is reliable. Determine any assumptions you are applying, and if you are holding irrational beliefs.

Being an independent, critical thinker promotes positive thinking. Each sound decision you make fosters an optimistic attitude, as outcomes become more positive and life starts spiraling upward instead of downward. The ability to make effective decisions will keep you heading in the right direction. It will help you not only reach, but maintain each level of Maslow's Hierarchy.

You can use critical thinking for simple, everyday, common reasoning. For example, think about why you buy something. If you buy a name brand, do you assume it will be better than the store brand or, at least, better for you? If a product says it has *low sugar,* what does low sugar actually mean? What it means to the manufacturer and what it means to you may be different. The producers may feel that 28 grams of sugar is low for cereal, while to you it is high. In this way, you can be misled if you don't take the time to read the small print on the back of the package and only take the word of the advertising. Recently, I bought a box of rice that claimed to be a low-carb food. Later when I was reading the back label, I discovered that it had 35 grams of carbohydrates, which seemed high to me.

On the macro level, critical thinking requires that you take the time needed to understand issues in more depth, in order to make more complex decisions such as buying a house, deciding which college to attend, or changing jobs.

Determine what you want to base your decisions on.

Decisions can be based on facts or on feelings, or both. As you work toward a decision, evaluate the risks and the facts. Listen to your feelings and discover the needs driving them. You may not have enough time to think the whole decision-making process through, or even to answer these three shortcut questions, but you can ask yourself: "Is this what I want to base my decision on?" "What do I want to base my decision on?"

How to Keep a Positive View About Yourself

Once you break the cycle of low self-esteem, your view of yourself becomes more positive. Remember: the low self-esteem cycle keeps a person locked into self-rejection and devaluation. This cycle can continue throughout a lifetime.

When you challenge your negative self-image, you begin to break out of the cycle of low self-esteem. You realize that past failures are simply situations that didn't work out the way you wanted them to. In fact, you can begin to look at all negative experiences and realize that there were underlying factors that you failed to consider and, without all the facts, you simply jumped to wrong conclusions.

It's amazing how simple this is, and how true! Once when I was in the fourth grade, our class was outside for recess. I knew that it was time to head back inside, so I walked up to the teacher to inform her of the time. She looked down and snapped at me, "Yes, I know what time it is!"

Whenever I recalled that memory, as insignificant as it may seem, I felt bad about myself. Using critical thinking, however, I reassessed the situation and identified faulty assumptions by searching for information I didn't see at the time. Maybe the teacher was having a bad day or was running out of patience with her job. Maybe she was ill. None of that made it right for her to snap at me, and I wasn't old enough to realize that I didn't need to take it personally. Yet for many years, that experience and others evoked a fear of people I didn't know well. I couldn't break the cycle of fear until I realized where it was coming from and why, and challenged it.

The only way to stop the negative cycle is to focus on discovering the truth and applying critical thinking each time we catch ourselves being critical of ourselves. Often, we criticize ourselves because we perceive that others will see us negatively. Yet, knowing our core, our self, gives us a solid foundation upon which to base self-worth and end self-rejection. Once you discover who you are, you have the choice whether to base your esteem on that factual information or on your old faulty perceptions and feelings.

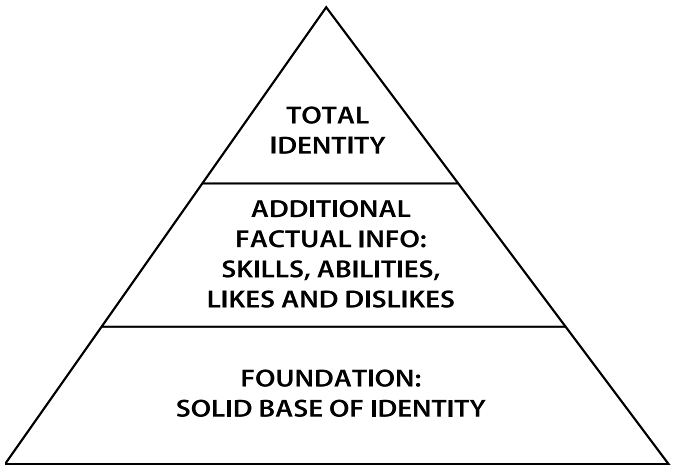
Positive feelings arise when you choose to believe truthful information about yourself. Basing self-esteem on the truth counters negative beliefs. When you see this,

you realize that your self-worth comes from you and no one or nothing else.

After realizing the truth, you can manage, maintain, and grow your positive self-esteem.

The pyramid below shows that there are three levels to our self-identity.

Self-Esteem Pyramid



The knowledge you have gained by completing the exercises in this book provides a solid foundation for establishing your identity. Once you have established the foundation for self-esteem, it is important that you continue to strengthen it. That is where the second level of the pyramid comes into play. The second level focuses on talents, abilities, likes, and dislikes, which are more easy to identify. You do this by adding new information about yourself, your foundation, as you discover it. This is the time to add up your accomplishments; you may even learn of new talents, passions, interests, and capabilities you never knew you had. Over time, you can continue to add to this body of information.

Step One

When your self-esteem is being challenged, first recognize the feelings that arise and determine where they are coming from. Ask yourself: *"What situation or event in my life are these thoughts and feelings related to?"* Or ask *"How am I anchoring (what is my reference point for) the negative self-talk?"*

Step Two

After determining how you are framing your feelings and what they are anchored to, step back and look for the truth as you critically analyze the situation. Do this by asking yourself an additional question: *"Are the reasons for the negative feelings or view*

tied to irrelevant factors that make my self-esteem contingent on something or someone else?" If this is the case, simply remember who you are. Think about your unique personality and your values and beliefs to reestablish your self-esteem. Then refuse to let any other information other than what is factual (true reference point) tell you who you are. You now have more control over your self-esteem. Continue doing this each time negative thoughts about yourself come to mind. Continue believing in yourself and the truths you know and hold about yourself.

Strengthening Your Self-Esteem

In addition to discovering and learning new talents and abilities, begin to set new goals. As you reach your goals and begin to feel a sense of accomplishment, the foundation of your esteem becomes stronger. You will feel new confidence. As you do these things, you'll be able to respect and value yourself even more than before.

Remember when reflecting on yourself to continue to perceive yourself truthfully. You know the truth about yourself, so reaffirm your self-worth in positive terms. Now you can apply positive thinking techniques, such as affirming that you are valuable, competent, good enough, smart, and desirable. Outside influences are not a reflection of who you are.

A person's total identity is a combination of the foundation and second layers. It is important that you choose to believe in yourself and see your whole self, not just individual parts. Step outside yourself and look at the bigger picture of who you are. This will help your confidence to remain strong; otherwise, it can be easy to forget and let a negative self-concept creep back in.

There are some common areas where people are often tempted to fall back in their self-image. One might be concern with your appearance. When you see images of "perfect" bodies and people, such as those that appear in magazines, and you begin to compare yourself, stop and challenge faulty thinking by remembering your foundation: who you are as a whole person. This is a way that you can truly love yourself.

You might be tempted to step back into a cycle of low self-esteem by some form of fear, such as fear of rejection. It may come up when you are asked to perform a new task at work or when you find yourself in an unfamiliar situation, like a social gathering. This type of fear can be immobilizing because we frame or anchor our decisions on a perceived level of rejection. When you feel an overwhelming feeling or emotion, don't automatically condemn yourself for it. Attend to it and analyze it. Ask yourself: "Where does it come from? Why am I feeling this?" You will encounter new challenges every day, but now you have the skills and power inside yourself to stop the feelings from taking control and to move forward in the correct manner.

Continue Looking at the Positive Side of Life

Now that you are better able to solve your problems and to control your depression and low self-esteem, continue to focus on having an optimistic outlook on life. Focus on and reflect on encouraging thoughts, such as these.

- I am feeling better every day-I can continue to be happy.
- I can succeed because I believe in myself.
- I am happy and content, and have long-lasting inner peace.
- I love myself unconditionally. I am dependent only on myself-nobody can take that away from me.
- Success is not measured by material possessions, but by the unconditional love, lasting peace, and joy I have inside.

Be Proud of Who You Are

- I am proud of myself.
- I am a good person.
- I am good enough.
- I am a worthwhile person no matter what happens to me.
- My life has changed-I overcame depression.
- I can think critically and now make rational decisions for my life. I am not trapped in any situation.
- I no longer need others to make me feel loved and accepted, because I love and accept myself unconditionally.
- I accept and support myself.
- Because I am now a better person, I can have more meaningful relationships.
- I am more capable of loving those whom I care about.

To Relax

- I no longer feel the pain from depression and low self-esteem.
- I no longer have to worry about getting my basic needs met.
- I can make logical, rational decisions.
- I can enjoy life-I take time to care about myself.
- I no longer have to try to control people and situations in my life.
- I no longer live in fear of catastrophic events.
- I see any setback as temporary and minor.

To Ease Worry

- I choose to forget and release the past.
- I have stopped blaming others.
- I have stopped being bitter toward others.
- I have stopped criticizing myself.
- I can accept challenges because I trust my decision-making.
- I now have the knowledge and wisdom to confront problems.
- I have the power to control my life.
- I am blessed because I now experience peace and happiness in my life, which is not dependent on objects or others.
- I love and approve of myself.

My wish for you is that you be completely free of self-limiting views and that you thrive in your newfound ability to live consciously, applying critical thinking to all areas. May you enjoy the freedom and love and success that I know are yours!

Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end.
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.
WINSTON CHURCHILL

Glossary

Ambiguous - Something is vague or unclear.
Analyze - To examine and identify why something happens or works.
Anchor - A reference point used to frame thoughts and decisions.
Belief - Something thought or accepted as true, especially about ourselves and our experience.
Bias - Prejudice in thought.
Conclusion - A final or firm thought or belief about something particular.
Decision-making - The action of choosing or making a decision.
Decision-making errors - Limitations to the decision-making process that influence errors and help create faulty decisions: overconfidence, fear of regret, conflict of interest, rule of thumb, anchoring, framing, availability of information, accuracy of information, past experiences, and oversimplification.
Depression - A persistent negative or sad state of mind or mood.
Emotion - A strong or overwhelming feeling.
Emotional thinking - Failing to use practical reasoning; when feelings and emotions guide the thought process and decision-making.
Evaluate - To assess something.
Fact - Truthful information. Information that is counted actual.
Fallacy - Deceptive belief or myth.
Faulty thinking - Thinking that includes errors that lead to wrong conclusions.
Feeling - A sensation or mood.
Forgiveness - To pardon another person.
Frame - The feelings and beliefs associated with the anchor.
Inference - To conclude without all the proper information.
Interpretation - The second phase in observing. To make a final conclusion about what was observed.
Logic - Common sense. To reason and use good judgment.
Love - To care for. To show affection.
Maslow, **Abraham** - A psychologist known for his contribution to understanding individuals' needs-popularized as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs-that includes physiological, safety, love, esteem and actualization needs.

Mindful thinking - The process of challenging our thoughts and feelings, associated with observing and interpreting
Needs - Human needs that individuals desire to live and to be happy.
Observe - The act of taking note of something.
Opinion - A person's view of something.
Outside influences - Influences other than our own that are used to make judgments and decisions.
Reality - What is a fact, or real, for an individual.
Reflect - To think back to a previous time.
Perceive - To identify or pick out something.
Personality - A consistent pattern as to how a person feels, thinks, and behaves.
Positive thinking - The action of using mindful thinking skills.
Rational thinking - Thinking based on good reasoning.
Reasoning - The action of calculating and interpreting information.
Self-actualization - To know and understand one's self, and feel contentment and peace.
Self-esteem - A perception one believes about him or herself.
Self-exploration - The action of discovering who a person is.
Self-knowledge - Understanding one's self, who one is.
Senses - The human body's ability to feel sensation and observe through the faculties of touch, smell, hearing, taste, and sight.
Stereotype - To categorize.
Stress - A constant worry often felt with anxiety.
Success - Sensation of accomplishment, satisfaction, or fulfillment.
Trait - A specific part of a personality.
Truth - A fact or reality.
Values - Beliefs that we hold to be important; they influence not only our behavior, as we continually try to live by them, but also our thinking and the judgments we make about what is right and wrong, good and bad.

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About the Author

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Jill Maschio suffered from depression until she discovered the principles of Critical Thinking. While she believes that some forms of depression may need to be treated with drugs and therapy, she holds that many forms of depression are incorrectly classified as disease and can be addressed successfully using the tools in this book and bibliotherapy to acquire self-knowledge, the lack of which causes untold suffering. She supports education as a primary method for overcoming depression whether or not you are using drugs and therapy for recovery.

Jill lives with her husband and is studying for a doctorate in psychology. She teaches the principles of Critical Thinking and the ten steps in her book in an effort to help others become free of depression and experience happiness.

Please visit
www.needhelpwithmydepression.com

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Overcome Depression by Finding Your Own Answers and Long-Term Solutions

Over 57 million people in the US suffer from depression in any given year. Jill Maschio experienced the emptiness and overwhelming feelings that come with depression. When traditional approaches weren't helpful, she was determined to find her own solutions. Jill searched for and found simple, readily-available techniques that improved her feelings about herself and life. In *When Your Mind Is Clear, the Sun Shines All the Time*, Jill Maschio shares her story while guiding you through the steps she took to successfully overcome depression.

Illumines Publishing is proud to bring you an inspiring self-help book that will guide you through overcoming your depression, including:

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- Key methods for overcoming your depression and maintaining a clear mind so you can experience the fruitful life you've longed for

"I found this book to be valuable and believe it can be very helpful to those who are dealing with depression as well as professionals who treat people with depression. I feel people dealing with mild to moderate depression can read this on their own and do the exercises for their growth and benefit. I believe professionals can use this book as the textbook to start and facilitate a psycho-educational group on depression. I feel people dealing with deeper, and perhaps endogenous depression, would be served to use the book as an adjunct to seeing a psychotherapist." - Bob Edelstein, LMFT, MFT

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